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MISS PANDORA

M. E. NORMAN

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Miss Pandora

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Miss Pandora

By

M. E. Norman

New York
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MISS PANDORA

CHAPTER I

NOT for the first time, Pandora related to Betty the story of her finding and her adoption.

"It was like Moses in the bulrushes," she said.

"Then, Dora, who *was* Moses?" asked the child.

"Don't you know who Moses was? He was in the Bible, of course, and wrote the Ten Commandments. You will learn about him all in good time——. The day I was found it was a day like this, in May, and the cowslips were out, and the primroses were just going over, and a cuckoo was calling in the wood over there——" Pandora paused and nodded towards the beechwood on the hill behind them, and Betty turned obediently and looked at it too as though she thought to find that cuckoo of so many years ago still singing there in the shade.

But everything was very still, a heavy mid-day heat brooded over the country, the sun streamed down upon the cowslip field, and the only bird that sang at all was a blackbird away back in the orchard at home. "Do you suppose that cuckoo's dead by this time?" Betty asked soberly.

"How should I know? I suppose so. Where was I? You interrupt so——"

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Betty insinuated herself a little nearer and leaned her dark curly head against Pandora's thin, black sleeve. "You were just getting to the part where 'Lizabeth comes along," she said. "Tell about her now, Dora, dear!"

"I am telling. It was twenty-two years ago, to this very day. Before you were begun, my dear. And Mummy was a small girl herself then, with her hair down her back in a thick red pigtail, and she had a blue pinny on with a hole in it. They say, too, that she had freckles on her nose."

"How old was she, Dora?"

"She was thirteen, and tall for her age. And she came down this very meadow where we are sitting. She carried a basket over her arm because she had been told to pick cowslips for Aunt Tabitha to make into cowslip wine. They made it in those days, you see——"

"What is cowslip wine, dear?"

"I am sure I don't know, child. Something for colds, very likely, like black-currant tea, but the idea of it has died out now with Queen Victoria. As I was saying, your Mummy came running along until she came to this very place where we are sitting—and there she stopped *dead*——"

Pandora made a dramatic pause and Betty's eyes grew round with expectation.

"Tell why did she stop dead!" she whispered, although, of course, she knew the reason as well as did Pandora herself.

"Why—because I was there!" said Pandora in a gratified voice—"lying on the bank of the stream—not a common little ragged, dirty baby that some tramp

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had got tired of—you mustn't imagine that, Betty! I was wrapped in a shawl of the finest Spanish lace, and my clothes were the most *beautiful* lace and embroidery you can possibly imagine; you can see them to this day if you like."

Betty had seen them, many times. She had even, on one day of brilliant inspiration, borrowed the little dress for the adornment of her doll, but discovery and retribution had followed swift and sure. From that date she had never cared to play with dolls again, and she still liked to hurry over the part of Pandora's story that dealt with the beauty of her clothes.

"Then do you suppose you are a Queen, or a Princess Royal, dear?" she asked reverently.

Pandora looked pensive—— "Scarcely that," she said, "though I think there is really very little doubt. However," she broke off—"there are things you are too young to understand yet, and if I were to mention them you would not be a bit the wiser. No, Betty, I am a mystery, and sometimes I would like to be cleared up. And sometimes I am content to know that I am a little bit different to everybody else."

She sat quite still for a minute, with her soft black eyes, that certainly were very different to the eyes of any other girl in St. Brides, fixed upon the stream beside them. "Sometimes I think that perhaps I am only a changeling after all," she added, for the further mystification of Betty.

"Pandora, *darling*, what is a——"

"It is a kind of fairy's child, dear. Probably there was some other little mortal baby the fairies wanted, so they spirited it away and left me here instead, for the

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first person who came along to find. Luckily for me, it was Elizabeth."

"Then, Dora, is there a chance that you are still a fairy?" asked Betty in some awe, for though the rest of the story was so old that she knew it off by heart, this exciting theory was quite new, and she watched Pandora eagerly, as though she half expected that she might be transformed before her very eyes.

"I have not the slightest idea, Betty. I dare say I am not quite human. I know I never seem able to have the same thoughts and feelings as other people. The most risqué gossip gives me no thrills and parties simply leave me cold—though perhaps that is an advantage, seeing I scarcely go to any," she added.

"Tell about the box!" pleaded Betty, who was beginning not to understand.

"Well," conceded Pandora, nothing loath, "the fairies, or whoever it was that dumped me down here, left me with the *strangest* luggage—and not even a label on it to say who I was to belong to, or whether I was a present from Titania or Oberon, or—or the King of all the Spaniards——"

"Dora—*who* is——"

"Never mind!" interrupted Pandora, "I really *can't* answer all your questions, Betty. You must learn to find things out by degrees. As I was telling you, it was the *strangest* luggage. Nothing but a little silver casket. And that is why your Great-aunt Tabitha insisted upon it that I should be called Pandora. The idea was quite good, but, to be consistent, I and my box should have brought nothing but ill-luck to mankind. Whereas——" She broke off, and added presently—

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"However, who knows, we may do so yet. Not that I want to, of course, but, as you have yet to learn, Bettkins, one cannot escape from one's fate."

"Tell what was in the box, dear," implored Betty.

"There were two things in the box," said Pandora, dropping her voice to a thrilling whisper. "This!" She raised her hand and touched with caressing fingers an opal that hung on a silver chain round her neck. It was as large as a pigeon's egg; the green and blue of frosted ice peaks, blood red and flame colour mingled in the depths of it. It was set in a dull band of silver round which was a sentence inscribed in Spanish—Pandora translated it for the benefit of Betty. "It means something like this," she said—"'To-day is yours; to-morrow belongs to God.' Then comes the date, 'January, 1894, Seville.' I imagine that was when and where I was born, my dear!"

She was silent for a moment, and then she added: "You are too young to quite understand what that means, Betty, but I have always taken it that it is best to let things drift. I have never tried to find out who I am. I think that 'to-morrow' will show—'Mañana,' as they say in Spain!"

Betty would have died sooner than betray that she did not perfectly understand the drift of Pandora's remarks. She watched the beautiful pale face for a few minutes in patient silence, then she whispered insinuatingly—"But there was *more* in the box than your beautiful opal, darling, you know there was *heaps* and *heaps* of . . ."

Dora put out her hand restrainingly——

"Am I telling this story, or are you, Betty? Don't

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you know that the first thing little girls ought to learn is *Manners*. It's ever so much more important than the alphabet, or sums, though few people seem to realize it. Where was I? Ah, yes—there was a blue envelope in the box, containing a lot of money—£5,000. Quite a good round sum, wasn't it, for the fairies to leave with me?"

"Very likely the King hasn't more," returned Betty, immensely impressed, for the most she had ever possessed herself was a silver threepenny, of which her jackdaw (the pet of the moment) had almost immediately possessed himself, and swallowed. "If it was mine, do you s'pose you know what I would buy, dear?" she went on in her gentle little voice—the gentle little voice that was apt to prove misleading to persons who had but a slight acquaintance with Miss Elizabeth Patricia Seaton.

"No, I don't," returned Pandora, who was, to tell the truth, so much concerned with what she wanted to buy for herself, and do for herself, that she had not much time left to bestow upon the aspirations of her small friend.

But Betty was not easily discouraged. "I'd buy a alligator," she said earnestly. "Quite a small baby one, to begin with, and I'd teach him things. They are terribly intelligent beasts, so Edward says. He knows."

"Oh, *rubbish!* If you had £5,000, child, you need not suppose you would have the spending of it before you were grown up, any more than I had. They would invest it for you. Your father would, and by the time you were grown up you would have a little fortune. That's what they did for me. Aunt Tabitha's lawyer—

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a horrid man with damp hands—I remember him still, though he died quite ages ago—put mine into something or other that brings me in £200 a year. And that, to my mind, is exactly the right amount, Betty, for you don't have to pay much income tax on it, and yet it is enough to keep your head above water and give you kidneys on toast for lunch on the days you remember to eat lunch at all!"

Betty pondered. £200 a year was an enormous fortune that surely put one for ever beyond the reach of the workhouse—a vague and awful place about which she knew *nothing for certain*, but which, according to Mary, was waiting to receive whole families of people if the children of the house left their crusts, or tore holes in the knees of their stockings through reckless climbing of the garden wall. A place which—again according to Mary—must be the inevitable destination of the entire Seaton family, unless a person referred to as "the Captain" or "your poor papa" came home pretty quick to put a stop to things.

Just what she meant by "things" the tongue of Mary would never say.

Betty, therefore, gazed with deep respect at Pandora, for ever set, by reason of her fortune, beyond the reach of these horrors. Moreover, she admired her intensely. Not only was she a person who could buy chocolate whenever she liked, and please herself entirely in everything she did, but she was—in Betty's opinion—entirely different from everyone else in the world. She admired her for the mystery with which she was surrounded, fascinated, perhaps unconsciously, by her air of detachment which set her a little bit apart from everybody.

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Then, too, she loved her black hair and her black eyes, and her white face that never got freckled or sunburnt or red, but remained always cool, and pale and distant, reminding Betty somehow of a little white rose that seemed in her childish thoughts very sweet and shy, and that grew in the shade.

But even she was conscious of some discrepancy here, for although Pandora was quite as beautiful and as white as the little rose in question, she was not at all shy, and neither her friends nor her enemies had ever described her as "sweet."

Only Betty herself did that, because she did not really quite understand what "sweet" meant. She heaved a little sigh now. "I do wish you lived with us still, like you used to, darling," she said.

Pandora smiled graciously. "When you are my age, my dear, you will understand just why I decided not to," she said. "Do you know what is the best word in the dictionary? You don't? Well, there are two—bracketed equal—and they are Freedom and Independence, and they ought both to be written with capital letters. Elizabeth agrees with me, and that, Betty, is why, after I had finished studying abroad, I decided to live in a little flat by myself and paint my pictures and live my own life, rather than go on living even with Elizabeth and you."

The child nodded wisely. "And, of course, you can come to us just as often as ever you like!" she said, quoting her mother.

"Of course I can, and do. For instance, I am coming to dinner to-night. I spend quite as much time at The Knowe as I do in my own flat. But the point is that I

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like to know that my flat is there to go to when I want to paint my pictures, or be alone, or smoke, or read novels, or stay in bed all day if I feel inclined, with nobody having the right even to say Why? And now, Betty, child, I am tired of talking; besides, I can tell you no more, so run away and play!"

And that was how Pandora's stories always ended—she grew tired of them and broke off short, long before Betty's interest in them was exhausted, and although she would have loved to hear more about the part her mother had played in the finding of Pandora, she knew quite well that no entreaties or coaxings would elicit one single other word. So she got up obediently, stifled a little sigh, pulled up her stockings, and, nodding, to Pandora, strolled off down the field in search of mischief.

Elizabeth Seaton's child had within her the makings of a philosopher.

Before she was out of sight, she was out of Pandora's mind. She continued to sit there on the bank of the stream with her dark eyes fixed with intent absent-mindedness on the slow-moving water. She would have been happy to sit there for an hour or two—doing nothing, thinking of nothing, content to feel the warm sun soaking into her and to know that she need not work unless she wanted to, need not play unless she wanted to, that she might, in fact, had she a mind for it, lie for hours long, day after day, in the grass with the sun upon her and the little wandering breeze playing over her, with the scent of the flowers and the song of the birds thrown in. What a gorgeous world! Why were people unhappy, or discontented, or tiresome?

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Pandora could see no reason for anything but rejoicing, for she was in the beatified state of mind which comes as a reaction after hard work satisfactorily accomplished. She swung always between two extremes, living at high pressure, in a delirium of work in which she painted like one possessed, or in a state of complete idleness in which a paint-brush was of no more use to her than a pickaxe. She had, that morning before breakfast, finished a picture called "Poppies." It was cram full of faults of drawing—for drawing was certainly her weak point—but she imagined that some of these she had successfully concealed with her paint brush. As for the rest—how true it is that the joy of creation is out of all proportion to the excellence of the thing created!

Pandora loved her "Poppies." She thought it original; it was certainly daring, and she knew that it would cause half the dear women of St. Brides to "sit up" could they but see it. The pity was, that the dear things were scarcely likely to avail themselves of the privilege, since in a body this important half of the population of St. Brides had come to the conclusion to have as little as possible to do with the family at The Knowe. And this of course included "that queer girl Elizabeth Seaton had adopted."

Pandora was thinking, more with amusement than with annoyance, of these women who had the cheek to disapprove of her, when the stillness of the day was broken by the voice of Elizabeth—followed presently by Elizabeth herself.

She hurried down the garden path to the gate that led into the meadow, opened this, and, as her eyes

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fell upon the motionless figure of the girl sitting amongst the cowslips, she called again, frantically—

"Pandora! Dora! Do call that *con*founded dog of yours! What in the world you want to bring him here for and *then* never look after him, I *can't* imagine!"

She hastened down the field, her little, untidily shod feet wantonly crushing cowslips and daisies beneath them, her sprig muslin dress, frilled and voluminous, of a fashion as dead and gone as King Edward, floated out and trailed behind her in the lush growing grass.

She wore no hat, and the sun shone with dazzling splendour in her red hair till the untidy, ruffled curls of it looked like a ball of fire. She carried a telegram crushed up in her hand, and the expression on her face was one of mingled joy and irritation.

"What's the matter?" asked Pandora in a calm voice when Elizabeth was near enough to hear a question that need not be shouted at her.

"Matter!" cried Elizabeth. "There's that beast of a dog of yours has wormed his way—goodness only knows how—into the larder and taken the chicken that was for to-morrow night's dinner—raw, of course, and I only hope it may choke him! And now he is running round the garden with it, worrying it—all over the sweet-pea beds, too, and you know what the man is—impertinent is not the word! If it wasn't for Roger coming back, I'd sooner die than have in a jobbing gardener!"

She broke off, with her hand pressed to her side, panting a little.... "I have chased him till my breath's gone," she added, "and if I catch him I dare say I shall wring his neck—so there's a warning for you!"

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The same warning had been given before with the same result. Mrs. Seaton, whose heart was in the right place where dogs were concerned, was invariably the first to forgive the offender and admit him back to favour.

Pandora sympathized languidly. "What a shame!" she murmured—"I mean, of course, about the chicken! Silas really shall be thrashed this time. If the jobbing gardener is impertinent he shall be made to do it, and then Silas will be sure to bite him, and they will both be punished. But as for the chicken, dear," she added, "take heart! He was only so called by courtesy. It was the old buff one without a tail. I missed him out of the crowd when I was feeding them this morning with Betty, and why Mary should have picked him out I simply can't imagine. He was *at least* five, and he looked horribly stringy!"

Elizabeth flung herself down on the grass beside Pandora and fanned herself with the telegram. Her face was white and her soft brown eyes were vague and strained with fatigue.

"Well, there's no use bothering, I suppose," she remarked. "You always were a sort of Job's comforter, Honey. But I have more disturbing news than that, even. Here am I, just finishing the last chapter of Part I. of 'The Curse of the Craddocks' when a little wretch of a telegraph boy rode up to the door on a bicycle and dismounted from it into the very middle of the newly planted-out geranium bed. Not that I care about geraniums at all, as you know, except in greenhouses—but, then, again, *the man!* Well, where was I? Oh—Mary's day out, of course, so I had to stop

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writing and go out to the little beast and warn him that I should have to complain if I caught him trespassing in amongst the flower-beds again. As for telegrams! How I hate them! Ever since one came when I was a child, saying that the bank had failed, I have had the greatest horror of them—— Who invented them, Pandora?"

"How should I know! Has another bank failed?"

"Oh no! But they always give one a sort of a shock, don't you think? This one is from Roger. And instead of coming home quietly to-morrow, by train as he had intended, when it isn't early closing day in St. Brides, and there would have been a decent dinner for him and Mary in to cook it, he is coming *now*, to-night, at once. And Silas has stolen the chicken (if we rescued it I doubt if there would be enough left of it even for a curry), and Mary has gone out, and where she goes to on her days I never can imagine. I believe she has a friend amongst Mrs. Miles' servants, and if that's the case, and she's there, I'd much sooner send up to heaven to fetch back someone dead and gone than send for her there!" Elizabeth paused, completely out of breath. Once more she closed her eyes and leaned her head against Pandora's shoulder.

"You look dreadfully tired," murmured the girl sympathetically. Mrs. Seaton sat bolt upright again.

"Tired!" she exclaimed. "I've been writing to-day as though the devil were at my shoulder—no, I've not had any lunch, I didn't want it—all to get Part I. finished before Roger came, and now I shan't manage it. Sickening! I might have won through if Mrs.

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Muir hadn't come. Pandora, save me from people who call themselves 'friends of the family.' Why should I suffer Mrs. Muir simply because my mother, who has been dead for thirty-three years, tolerated her? I shall never know—yet, on the strength of that dead-and-gone friendship, she does the most monstrous things—walks into the house without ringing, for one thing. Then, having forced her way in, she finds my MS. lying on the table and picks it up and reads it—with Aunt Tabitha sitting at the other side of the fireplace nodding and grinning at her like one bewitched. When I came into the room, there they were, the two of them, and Mrs. Muir began to criticize my work. Criticize! Ye gods, Pandora! It's not criticism I want after I've been working five hours at a stretch, but a little praise. Goodness only knows I'm harder on my faults than anyone else can possibly be!" And poor, overwrought Elizabeth wiped away a tear with a grimy little handkerchief about the size of a five-shilling piece. Then she laughed.

"As for Roger," she said, "there's not a thing for him to eat in the house but rubbish—cream cheese, sponge cake, and such like! Oh, and a tin of cocoa has just come from the Stores instead of the whisky I am almost certain I ordered. What *am* I to do?"

"I can't understand why you aren't more pleased that Roger is coming," commented Pandora. "For the last week you have talked of nothing and nobody but him, and you know you marked off the days on your calendar, and said your prayers that his ship might not go down in the Bay of Biscay; yet now that he *is* coming anybody would think from the way you are grum-

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bling that he was just a second cousin twice removed coming up on a duty visit from London!"

"Oh!" cried Elizabeth impatiently. She made a gesture that consigned the stupidity of Pandora and Roger and the whole universe to high heaven. "Can't you *see*, I expected him *to-morrow*. I made my plans for that. I should have had my yellow muslin home from the wash—Mary would have been in to cook a decent dinner—I should have finished Part I. and been ready to be nice to him. As things are, I feel more inclined to receive the Emperor of China than Roger! I am not in the mood for him. Will you and Betty go down into the town and order what food is to be had? Where is the child?"

"Unless she has fallen into the river, which isn't likely, she can't be far. I suppose we shall have to go. What shall we order? Remember, Beurr's is shut."

Elizabeth knitted her brows in perplexity. "I wish Lloyd George was dead," she remarked as a result of her cogitations. "Half the worries in the world are caused by this Early Closing Act, I do believe. How is one to remember everything, I don't know. . . . Strange, when I want to order a dinner I never seem able to think of anything but liver and bacon, which we haven't had for years. Help me, Honey, what do men like?"

"I know nothing of men. I haven't been married for eight years, and you have. I wonder if your Roger will like me, Elizabeth?"

Elizabeth smiled indulgently. It was so exactly like Pandora to regard the coming of Roger from her point

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of view entirely, and to wonder, first and foremost, how it was going to affect her!

"Of course he'll like you!" said Elizabeth. "How could he help it? The funny thing is that you have never managed to meet, the two of you. Let me see, when I first knew him and we were engaged, this house was let, and we were living down at Weymouth, Aunt Tab and I. You were at school at Hastings at the time. And when we were married, three months later, you had measles and couldn't come. Then you had whooping-cough. Then I went to Malta with him. After a year, I came home for Betty to be born. Then he was sent to Australia, and his next leave you were in Paris studying art—that's how it was. But depend upon it, he is dying to meet you——. How would lobster do, Honey?" she broke off to ask—"or are they the sort of tiresome things you can only eat when there's an *R* in the month?"

"What an absurd idea! If I see one I'll get it—if not, what about cod?"

"Certainly *not!* You seem to forget Mary is out. Cod has to be boiled with either vinegar in the water or lemon, I forget which. Besides, it's eaten with egg sauce, and reminds me of flannel shrunk in the wash. No, get ham. It will come in useful for breakfast—what's left of it. Anything else you like. Oh, and do look in on Edward as you pass and ask him to lend us a bottle of whisky. Better perhaps ask him to come to dinner and bring it with him—soda-water too, of course. Explain to him that they sent cocoa instead, and that Roger is coming, and as it is Wednesday the Stores are shut, and there's nowhere else I can reliably get it.

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Tell him, too, that it's Mary's night out, so there will be no one to wait and nothing much to eat. I hope he won't come, so don't press him *too* much, Honey, though I suppose it is only decent to ask him if we are going to drink his whisky. And, anyway, you can amuse him. It seems to keep him quiet even to sit and look at you!" Elizabeth laughed and looked at Pandora with loving eyes. "You are so beautiful," she said, "you frighten plain me!"

But when Elizabeth laughed, her mouth, which was large, curved up at the corners and displayed two rows of perfect teeth. To be sure, her nose was slightly crooked and had freckles across the bridge of it—but her hair was gorgeous, and her soft brown eyes had a plaintive sweetness in their expression which was alluring but slightly misleading.

Pandora rose lazily and stood looking down on her. She was somewhat taller than Elizabeth and very slight; dressed in black, with her masses of black hair and her white, white skin, she had the air of a Spanish señorita in a picture—an air which she was at some pains, by the way, to cultivate.

She did not answer Elizabeth's last remark or her laugh, or seem to be aware of either.

"Well, I am going for the food," she said lazily. "When does your Roger come?"

Elizabeth referred to the telegram in her hand.

"He comes about seven," she said, "or is it six? How badly these people at the post-office write! By motor-car, from Edinburgh—*whose* motor, he doesn't say. I hope he hasn't bought one. I hate them. However, never mind, it is now 3.30. Better say dinner at 8.

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And that will allow for everything—breakdowns, the cooking of the dinner, and so forth," she added vaguely. "Now I am going back to my study to work like the very devil till he comes, so don't disturb me, Honey, or Betty either. Tell her I'll behead her if she comes near me." She nodded to Pandora and trailed away again through the cowslips and the fresh green grass.

But at the garden gate she turned and called back again—"And if you could cook a potato or so for supper, or toss off an omelet or something with a dash of cheese in it, I would be just ever so grateful!"

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CHAPTER II

PANDORA walked down the hill into St. Brides. The afternoon was very hot and still, and the road was white with dust; already the young green of the hedges was powdered over, their first freshness gone. A blackbird in the gorse on the cliffs sang its song over and over; from the fields on either side, larks rose carrying their joy far out of sight into the dazzling blue. In front lay the little town, straggling down the hill through the sloping fields to the bay—a cluster of time-worn grey buildings and gay red roofs that contrasted finely with the sea, as blue and quiet to-day as the sky into which it melted on a dim horizon.

Pandora turned presently through a ruined gateway into a street of ancient houses whose front doors opened on to wide pavements flanked by trees. Here, at the top of the street, it was peaceful and quiet, though lower down, where the shops began, there was noise and bustle enough. The houses seemed to sleep behind drawn blinds. No one was about, save two elderly ladies who paced along the shady side with their umbrellas up as a further protection from the sun.

They were exactly opposite Edward Rattray's house when Pandora reached it, whereupon Mrs. Mackenzie turned to her sister, Mrs. Muir, and said sharply, "There's that girl of Elizabeth Seaton's going in to Dr. Rattray's again!"

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Mrs. Mackenzie's husband—long since happily gathered to his fathers—had been Rattray's uncle; Mrs. Mackenzie, however, always referred to him, even to her sister, by his surname. It was her subtle way of emphasizing her own intimacy with the eligible bachelor of St. Brides, whilst carefully excluding others from it. To his face, she usually called him Eddy. She had five daughters most unfortunately plain and lacking in attraction.

"How these two women do pursue the unhappy man!" she added.

"It's natural enough Elizabeth should want to get Pandora off her hands," replied Mrs. Muir.—She who more than thirty years ago had been friends with Mrs. Seaton's mother felt it incumbent upon herself to put in a mild word for the daughter every now and then.—This done, she was free to return with the greater zest to the discussion of Pandora's many failings. "But I pity him, indeed, if he lets himself be caught by a girl like Pandora."

The two women having reached the point at which they could no longer keep their eyes fixed upon Rattray's house without actually looking back over their shoulders, turned with one accord and slowly retraced their steps, watching with indignant gaze the manœuvres of Miss Pandora, who, all unconscious of the interest which she was arousing in their breasts, had rung a resounding peal on the bell of No. 56, Abbey Street, above which was inscribed on a small brass plate: "Don't ring unless an answer is required."

"The way she dresses herself is enough to make anybody suspicious of her morals!" pursued Mrs. Muir,

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whose own clothes were undoubtedly of a pre-Georgian cut and fashion.

"I think these bare necks, and the general air of transparency about her garments positively indecent! Be thankful, dear Louisa, that your nice girls are not like her in any way!"

Privately Mrs. Mackenzie was not quite as thankful for this mercy as she pretended to be. Her income was small, and her "nice girls"—perhaps handicapped by their extreme niceness—showed a marked inaptitude in the noble sport of husband-hunting. Mrs. Mackenzie was getting rather sick of assuring other mothers that she, for her part, was in no hurry to get rid of her girls. Besides, of course, nobody believed her.

She answered her sister with considerable tartness now. "I am glad to say that my girls have not grown up with the example before them that Pandora has. Whatever you may say in her defence, Kate, I distrust Elizabeth Seaton profoundly. In my opinion she is fast and frivolous and foolish to a degree. No *nice* woman would write the penny dreadfuls she does for the weekly papers. And how her husband can tolerate having his name dragged, so to speak, through the mouths of every servant girl and tradesman's daughter, I simply cannot imagine!"

"My dear Louisa, he cannot help himself. Elizabeth has a strong will of her own. Moreover," added Mrs. Muir with some spirit, "her stories are extremely readable. Whatever else Elizabeth is—and heaven knows I am alive to all her faults even though her mother was my bridesmaid—she is never dull. Ah!" she broke off eagerly, "look there!"

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Mrs. Mackenzie needed no second bidding, and she was in time to see Pandora, who had evidently grown impatient at getting no answer to her ring, step back into the road and, putting her fingers into her mouth, utter a shrill whistle.

"Merciful heavens!" whispered the two ladies in chorus. "Whatever next!" "Next" was that in instant response to the whistle a head was thrust from the window and the voice of Mrs. Mackenzie's much valued relative called out in accents of unmistakable pleasure:

"Hulloa, Dora! What you do want? I'm busy."

"I know your business," replied the low and languid voice of Pandora—"cleaning your golf clubs, no doubt. I want whisky, and soda too. Elizabeth's Roger is coming back unexpectedly to-night, and it seems there's nothing in the house but cocoa."

"Cocoa! Ye gods! What in the world would he do with cocoa?"

"That's what Elizabeth wonders. So if you have got whisky, give me some. Shall I come up and get it, or will you bring it yourself?"

"Oh, come up and get it, of course. I have a reputation, Pandora. I can't be seen carrying even the best Scotch through the streets of St. Brides. I have the feelings of five solid patients to consider. . . . Give the door a push and walk right up—we are attracting too much attention as it is!"

He broke off to smile and bow affably to the two ladies who, after returning the salutation with as much cordiality as their outraged feelings would permit, turned once more and walked down the street.

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Meanwhile Pandora did as directed, and as she had done many times before, and walked into the house of which every girl in St. Brides was more than willing to be mistress. It was the oldest house in the town. Mary, Queen of Scots, had lived in it. It was full of surprises—winding dark passages panelled in oak, unexpected rooms of queer shapes and delightful windows. One of these rooms had a secret cupboard in it in which the Queen of Romance had stored her love letters. Her prie-dieu still stood in a corner of it, and her crucifix, of dull silver and ivory, hung upon the wall.

To add to these attractions, there was the master of the house himself.

Edward Rattray was a doctor—a profession which he had adopted for no other reason than to oblige his grandfather who, in return, had left him this "very desirable residence" together with a comfortable income.

This end achieved, Fate, an easy-going disposition, and a passion for golf, all combined to assist Dr. Rattray in having the fewest possible patients and plenty of time at his disposal in which to enjoy life and have a good time all round.

As far as appearance went he was quite pleasing enough to warrant the attentions of the female sex apart from the desirability of his possessions. A couple of years over thirty, he looked less, for he lived as much as possible in the open air, had a good digestion, and never met trouble half-way. Report said that he had a frightful temper, but no one could be found who had ever seen it roused to vouch for the truth of the statement. His blunt, somewhat crooked

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features were expressive of a general well-being and contentment rather than of any extraordinary intelligence or desire to push to the fore-front of the battle or to the top of the tree, or indeed to any place of singular prominence. If he cherished an ambition it was to win the amateur championship of Scotland—a distinction for which he qualified himself with a painstaking zeal that certainly should have won him success. He cherished one other ambition, but he imagined that it was still a secret.

Pandora walked up the shallow, wide stairs and pushed open the door of the smoking-room.

Rattray was lounging on two chairs by the window, clad in an extremely unprofessional and ancient suit of grey flannels. He was reading a detective novel, a box of Virginian cigarettes stood open within reach upon the window-sill.

"Please don't get up!" entreated Pandora sarcastically. "I really did not want to come in for I have other messages to do, but these two dreadful Muir-Mackenzie women were hanging about outside being shocked—so I did, just to shock them more!"

She sat down on the edge of the polished table and took her hat off and flung it on to the couch behind her. Then she ruffled up her black hair where it had got flattened with the weight of her hat and looked at Edward through half-closed eyes, and smiled.

The sunlight slanted across her little head and showed that it had blue shadows in it—as deep as indigo. It was her hair always that confused Edward and made it difficult for him to keep his head. When she complicated matters by looking at him with half-

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closed smiling eyes, she made the task an almost impossible one.

He got up abruptly, upset his cigarettes, kicked the box away and looked at his watch. "I say!" he exclaimed with studied carelessness, "it's four o'clock; I'm due down at the Club now to have a round of golf with a man."

"Well—go! Don't let me keep you!" Pandora still sat on the edge of the table with the sun on her head, smiling at him through half-shut eyes. No doubt she knew that her position was a strong one.

"You are not keeping me," returned Edward. He took up his favourite putter and examined it closely and critically. "That is, you are—but I am just as glad. I have—things to say to you."

"Oh, have you? And what about the man? Will he be 'just as glad,' do you suppose, if you keep him hanging on indefinitely?"

"Oh—he don't matter. He is rather a little beast anyway. I wouldn't have played with him if he hadn't made rather a point of it. A man called Fanshawe. I don't suppose you know him?"

"A little, cynical, dried-up man—rather like a pocket Mephistopheles with the fascination withered out of him?—a horrid-looking person."

"That's the chap. Pandora, stop to tea with me. I'll ring for old Mother Smiley to get a cream sponge from M'Arthur's and make buttered toast. We can talk better over tea."

"You seem to be talking without much trouble now. I don't want tea—not yet, anyway. We had all sorts of things for lunch at The Knowe—the things that take

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your appetite away for the rest of the day. Better go and keep your appointment with this Fanshawe man. You never know when people may take ill and need a doctor. You don't want Dr. Walker to have *everyone*."

"Yes, I do. I'd rather he did. He wants 'em. Pandora—do you know that your hair is exactly the shade of a raven's wing. I have remarked it before."

"Yes, you have. And I wish you would think of something else to remark. You ought to be used to my hair by this time!"

The gentleness of Pandora's voice was not in accord with the severity of her words.

Edward lighted another cigarette with fingers that shook a little. Then he pitched the match out of the window, where it alighted upon the open umbrella of his respected aunt immediately beneath, for she and her sister had crossed over and were now retracing their steps very slowly upon his side of the street whilst they waited in increasing perturbation for Pandora to emerge. Unaware of what he had done, he gazed reflectively out of the window for a moment, then, coming to a swift decision, he turned to Pandora and answered her.

"The fact is, you change so often that I never can get used to you at all," he said. "I see you on Monday and you are playing with Elizabeth's kid, and you are quite a nice girl—not much more than a kid yourself, and—I love you, Pandora——" He paused, looking at her wistfully; but she, in a swift, startled voice, bade him go on. He gave a little laugh. "Well —I see you on Tuesday, but you are quite different. Sort of stiff and haughty. You keep me at arm's

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length as though you wondered what the deuce business I had to be there at all, and I go away discouraged and wondering if I don't hate you after all. Sometimes I do hate you—until Wednesday, when I meet yet another Pandora, the nicest of all, I think—charming and lovely and sweet. So I think it's all right again, and I go away treading on air and believing in the Seventh Heaven, and I make up my mind that I'll tell you all about it to-morrow. To-morrow comes, and there I am, put back into Class I. again, for you take no more interest in me than if I were the man calling about the gas bill, and I am left wretched, loving you and hating you; and through it all I can't make head or tail of you, Pandora. For sometimes—forgive my presumption, dear—I think you care for me a little, and much more often I am forced to the conclusion that you don't care a curse about me——"

He finished roughly. Long ago he had abandoned his careless attitude, and, leaning forward, he watched her intently, imploringly.

As for Pandora, she met his eyes without any signs of embarrassment, but with a sort of reflective curiosity that was scarcely calculated to raise his hopes.

"So—you love me," she said at last in her slow voice. Pandora had a slightly foreign accent which she had been at such pains to cultivate that it had become almost second nature to her. As a rule it was an added attraction to her low tones, but to-day it jarred upon him somehow with its suggestion of unreality.

"Didn't you know it already? I thought women always knew these things," he said with a short laugh.

She shook her head. "I do as a rule," she said can-

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didly, "but I never guessed it with you—to tell the truth you have never seemed to me to be much in earnest about anything."

He was as much in earnest now as the most exacting could desire. He stood beside her, looking down at her, very white, with restraint and determination in every line of his face. The change in him arrested her attention and pleased her rather than otherwise. To tell the truth, she had of late grown to look upon him with mixed feelings.

There had been a time, a year or two ago, when she had loved—or thought that she loved—this man, but in these days his attentions had been entirely fixed upon another girl—Kate Wilbur by name, for whom Pandora had then and since for ever after cherished a deep dislike.

Kate was not pretty, but she was smart, conventional and amusing—the type of girl who is never neglected by men and never without a certain attraction. Edward hovered round her like a moth round a lighted candle. Whether he ever proposed to her, or whether he tired of her as, to tell the truth, he had tired of a good many other girls before her, was a mystery as yet unsolved by Pandora. Whilst he was still adoring, Pandora went to Paris. When she returned the glamour had gone from him in her eyes. She saw him as other men. She was cured. She had never fallen in love with him again, though she liked him enough to wonder sometimes if she had. She certainly took a deep interest in him and knew all his faults by heart. His lack of ambition displeased her, and she would have despised him for it, only there was just something about him that

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forbade it. Moreover, he had a way of keeping even with her by reason of his knowledge of art which put him in a position to criticize her work. He did it, too, and with unflattering candour; but with an understanding all the same that roused her unwilling admiration. It was rather his way, too, to make fun of her and her moods, her talent and her ambition. Sometimes he even expressed his opinion that she was wasting her time trying to paint, and that she would be better employed if she were to help Elizabeth by looking after Betty. He thought the world of Elizabeth. If he loved anybody at all, Pandora would have guessed that Mrs. Seaton, and not herself, was the object of his affections.

The knowledge that it was she whom he loved after all came as a shock to her. But her predominant feeling was one of triumph.

He was silent so long, standing there, looking down at her, that she grew impatient at last. There wasn't much good having a man in love with you if he didn't say something about it.

She got up——

"Well," she said slowly, "if that's all, I am going. It's Mary's day out; and Elizabeth is all alone. She is trying to finish Part I. of this story of hers before Roger arrives. She says if she has to answer the front door bell once again to-day she will kill someone."

"Let her kill everyone in St. Brides if she likes! Don't go yet, Pandora!" He caught her hand and held it entreatingly. "I haven't said my say yet. I have scarcely begun. I love you."

There was nothing in all the world that she wished

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so ardently at that moment as that he had said it to her three years ago. If everything comes to him who waits, it comes as often as not too late. She tried to feel thrilled and to recapture the sense of romance with which this man had once filled her. She only succeeded in wondering how he had ever done it. "I believe I am glad!" she said slowly.

"You are glad! That's all I want! Oh, Dora! Dora!" He caught her to him and would have kissed her, but with a quick movement she was free of him. Her face was as white now as was his. Her eyes, darker than ever by contrast with the pallor of her cheeks, shone at him sombrely.

"Don't do that again!" she said. "I have not given you leave yet. I don't know that I ever shall give you leave. If you come near me, I shall be obliged to go!"

At that his patience suddenly gave way; he walked with an angry gesture to the door and put his back to it.

"Not till you've given me an answer," he said shortly. "Yes—or No. You've got a way of leading one on and holding one back that is pretty maddening, at times, Dora. Are you going to marry me?"

She looked at his flushed face calmly. "Do you know, Edward," she said, "that if I were to look out of the window and shout, those Muir-Mackenzie women, who are still parading up and down the street waiting to see how long I stay here with you, would come up simply rejoicing to make a scandal out of it, and ready to believe the very worst. Besides, what about your housekeeper? No doubt she is on the stairs now, longing for an excuse to come in. There is no need

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for me to say at this moment whether I will marry you or not. You must give me time to make up my mind. If you won't do that, I must just say No, straight away."

He looked at her for a moment hard, as if he were trying to understand her, then a smile came into his blue eyes though there was an underlying expression of pain and irritation. He came away from the door.

"I suppose I am a brute," he said, "but there is one thing women never will learn, and that is not to play with fire——" He stopped, looking at her kindly, his crooked mouth smiling, too, now.

"I am sorry," she faltered. "I didn't mean——"

"No—you never do mean, that's where the hard bit comes. I won't keep you, if you really want to go, Pandora."

But, thus presented with her freedom, she, of course, no longer wanted it. She temporized.

"I scarcely know whether I love you, or not, Edward; very likely we don't even mean the same thing by love."

"Oh, my dear Pandora!" he burst out impatiently, then checked himself. "There is only one thing that love can mean," he added quietly.

She smiled at him in her superior wisdom.

"But you have loved so many girls, Edward, how am I to know that I am not just one more of the crowd?"

"I have flirted with a good many—yes; fancied myself in love with them, too, if you will have it so. But I have never loved but one, and that is yourself. And I shall never love another. Do you believe me?"

"Oh, yes, certainly I believe you. Poor Edward! Why do you look as if it were a tragedy? It is just as bad for me. If you had said this to me three years ago

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—before I went abroad, in fact—we should both have been happy now!"

"Three years ago!" He seized on it—"You loved me then?"

"Yes, I did. I would have married you then and been happy—but now—now——"

"Yes—now?" he insisted. He followed her to the window, but she was silent, gazing out into the street with sombre eyes. Although he was close beside her she was not thinking of him any longer, but of someone quite different, just as she saw, no longer, the scene before her, but another—a town of narrow streets on a bare hillside, white, dazzling houses, the whiter for their painted green shutters and for the black shadows they cast; wide, cool courtyards, where fountains splashed and cooled the air. She could feel, again, the burning sun, recall the hot, thick, sweet scent that permeated the atmosphere. Always, at will, she could recall it, and the memory never failed to shake her. She closed her eyes to keep the tears back.

And all the time he was pleading with her to marry him. His low, urgent voice fell upon deaf ears. She scarcely remembered that he was there, but when he caught her hand and held it pressed to his lips while he murmured over it fond, ridiculous words, she turned to him half curiously, half pityingly. She drew her hand away.

"Poor Edward!" she said—"and poor me! Don't you understand—there is another man in the case?"

Something seemed to flame up in him, and to consume every consideration save his own desire for her. With a supreme effort he kept very still while her quiet,

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even voice went on telling him things that hurt like death.

"Yes—I love him. God knows why, for I don't, though I have puzzled over it often enough. I don't know his name, or where he lives, or any single other thing about him than that I met him once and fell in love with him and am not likely ever to meet him again."

He made an inarticulate sound, gazing at her with haggard eyes and with his crooked mouth drawn in a hard line.

"I don't know why you should mind so," she said with a touch of petulence—"I am not worth it. I don't want you to love me now; it is too late. I don't know that I particularly want the other man to love me even. I am not the sort to make myself wretched for a man; and there are other things in the world than love——"

"Pandora, that is Elizabeth's influence."

"Well, what if it is? I agree with her. Why should I spoil my life crying for the moon? It is beyond my reach, and I like it where it is. If I had it, it might make me wretched. Take my advice——"

"Thanks," he said, "that's a thing I have never been good at doing. Besides, I know that the moon I am crying for is what I want——"

"And so you'll never rest till you reach up and pull it down from heaven?"

"Never. So when will you answer me?"

"As soon as I have made up my mind!"

She looked at him, a little smile, so faint it was to be guessed at rather than to be seen, in her eyes.

Then, without another word on either side, she walked

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past him out of the room, down the wide, shallow steps and into the sunny street where the two ladies in a sort of desperate patience were still walking up and down, up and down, with their eyes on the house.

As Pandora passed them they barely inclined their heads to her, so excited were they by the discovery that she had come away without her hat.

But Pandora, fathoms deep in thought, was scarcely aware of their presence and certainly did not notice the omission.

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CHAPTER III

WITH her red head bent over her MS., Elizabeth sat at the table in the window of her study and wrote.

It seemed as if nothing in all the world existed for her but her work. For the time being, nothing else did exist. She had ceased to think of Roger, or of the fowl, or of supper. She had also forgotten, most completely, that there was nothing in the house for breakfast to-morrow. But even if the thought had occurred to her, it would not greatly have afflicted her, for Elizabeth was of those who take no thought for the morrow. Besides, Mary could always make porridge—or there was the chance that a stray egg or so might be found in the hen-house. An off-chance, by the way, for Elizabeth's fowls always seemed to be "clocking" or moulting, or to be too young, or too old, to lay.

In her corner by the fireplace, with her feet encased in high-heeled, brocaded slippers, sat Aunt Tabitha. A lace shawl was draped mantilla-wise over her head; her hands, which had once been beautiful but were now misshapen and hideous with age, were outspread upon her lap. She sat very, very still; only, every now and then, she would smile and nod her head as if someone was sitting in the empty chair opposite to her on the other side of the hearth—and, all the time, in her sunken eyes was an expression indescribably cunning. It was

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as if she were for ever turning over in her mind, with secret glee, some malevolent plot.

A mistake, however. The days of Aunt Tabitha's plotting and planning were gone for ever.

She had, some years ago, sunk into a state of dotage in which the only thing that really seemed to matter to her was eating. For the rest, she lived very happily in the past, imagining herself to be the toast of the county. She was not clear about the identity of anyone, though she had her gleams of intelligence concerning her niece Elizabeth, and Mary.

Mary had come very soon after the discovery of Pandora, though it seemed that she had known Miss Tabitha in prehistoric days, almost before Elizabeth came on the scene. At any rate, in all these years she had established a sort of authority over her mistress, and was reported to be able to manage her when she was in one of her "contrary" moods.

There had been a time when the mere presence of Aunt Tabitha in the room when she was working had wellnigh driven Elizabeth to distraction, and if she could have had her way of it the old lady would never have been allowed to set her high-heeled feet across the threshold of the study.

But the determination of Elizabeth was worn down by the insistence of the ancient dame with the wandering, cunning eyes. If the door was locked in her face she would wait outside on the mat until it was opened again, when she would slip inside with a triumphant chuckle and take up her place by the fireside until she was evicted once more—when the same thing would be gone through again. Her pertinacity had won.

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Long ago Elizabeth had ceased to care whether she was there or not.

It was not that Elizabeth's work was of any high order. In the intellectual world her name was unknown; it was not even familiar to the ordinary frequenter of the libraries. For she had never published a novel; the truth was, she was in a groove, and the ever-present need of money and her impatience of difficulties kept her in it, writing always for a well-known firm of publishers who had a huge circulation for their many periodicals, and whose payment was sure and fairly good. She had, moreover, what she herself called "a damned facility with the pen," which made such writing as was required of her fatally easy; she knew exactly how to hit off the taste of the public for which her editors catered; her name was a draw, and her tales, mostly of love with a dash of mystery thrown in, were eagerly looked for and read by readers of *Home Life*.

She was, at the present moment, just half-way through a serial; the position was critical for, as it not infrequently happened, the plot had taken a different turn to what she had anticipated; her heroine, instead of being nice, as was intended, was proving herself to be a cat, and Elizabeth, with her nerves on edge with the worry of it, sat there in the sunny window, writing, writing, writing, dead to the world and Aunt Tabitha and everything.

Silas, the unforgiven, slept at her feet the sleep of the unjust and the well-fed. The old lady nodded and smiled and made signs to her invisible partner in the chair opposite. No doubt, in her crazy old mind, she

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wondered about the next meal, but she knew that in this room talking was strictly forbidden, and, somehow, she respected Elizabeth.

The clock struck five. The milk-girl came to the door, and, after she had knocked about six times, the sound penetrated to the ears of Mrs. Seaton. With a muttered exclamation she flung down her pen and went to the door.

"There's no need to hammer the house down," she said crossly. "What do you want?"

"Please, m'm, the milk."

"But I haven't got any milk. We don't keep cows; go to the farm."

"Please, m'm, it's the milk you ordered. I'm from the farm."

"Well, why not say so at once, my good child?" returned Elizabeth loftily.

She took the milk-can from the girl and looked at it irresolutely.

"Did I really order all this?" she asked.

"Yes, m'm. Mary did. Threepence worth, as usual. You'll maybe keep the can till morning?"

"Certainly," returned Elizabeth, much relieved, for she had no idea where the milk-jugs were kept. On Mary's day out, which mercifully, for Mary was a treasure, happened only once a month, Pandora usually came up and saw to things.

Elizabeth herself was as helpless and ignorant about the house as a child. It was too bad of Pandora to be out now. Surely it need not take all afternoon to borrow a bottle of whisky from Edward Rattray. "And that reminds me," she called out after the de-

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parting milk-girl, "if you see my little girl playing about anywhere, send her up to me *at once*. Tell her to hurry!"

Whilst she waited for the child she put on the kettle for Aunt Tabitha's tea, and cut a slice of bread which she spread thickly with butter and then with brown sugar, for the old woman at the age of eighty-nine was possessed of the sort of appetite usually associated with the very young.

Elizabeth wanted nothing herself. She never could eat whilst she was working, and just now her head burned, and it was full of ideas. Every-day things—eating and drinking and ordering of the house—seemed unnecessary, unreal and irritating. She looked white and rather dazed.

"Bettkins!" she said, when the little girl appeared. "I want you to go and perch on the front gate, and if anyone comes—I don't care who it is—tell them to go to Jericho. I am frightfully busy, and I can't be disturbed."

"Am I *really* to say Jericho, Mummy? Cos I doubt if there's such a place. It's not marked in the geography of Scotland."

"If you like it better, say I've gone to bed with a bilious head, chicken. I dare say it's politer. Here, take a drink of milk—not out of the can, piglet, and your little mouth *so* grubby! What *have* you been doing?"

"Trying the gooseberries in the garden, but they are very tiny yet and so disappointing, dear," said Betty with her best grown-up air, that contrasted oddly with her very short and crumpled holland frock and her small, dirty face.

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"Oh, heavens!" moaned Elizabeth. "Why was I born to have children? I really *don't* know what to do with you, Betty. I feel sure you ought to be whipped or have a pain, or something, for that. Yet, here I am quite unequal to punishing you—I forbid you to eat any more gooseberries till I say you may. There!"

"Mightn't I have a little lovely bit of sugary-shag like the bit you are giving Aunt Tab, dear?" coaxed the unrepentant Betty.

"Oh, I suppose so—yes—there now, cut along and don't let me see you again a moment before I want to."

And Elizabeth, believing the kettle to be boiling, made Aunt Tabitha's tea, and departed with it to the study and to her work again.

Betty went down the short drive, and, with the help of a convenient tree, climbed on to the wall and sat upon it cross-legged, with her back up against the gate-post. She had filled her pocket with split peas, and she carried, stuck into her leather waist-belt, a pea-shooter, her most secret and cherished possession. With this she aimed in an impartial manner at the passers-by. Their remarks when she aimed straight were part of the fun—the threat to "tell yer Ma" being the most pleasing. The only pity was that she betrayed a truly feminine aptitude for hitting what she had not aimed at.

Half an hour or more sped by with this profitable employment. No one had passed as yet but country people, and even these were few and far between, for The Knowe stood back from the main road in a little lane that led across country to what was known as the old highroad. Just as she was thinking of giving up, a red motor car came into sight round the bend.

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A motor always gave Betty thrills, for two reasons—firstly, because she desired, more ardently than anything in life, to have a drive in one; and secondly, because she lived in the hope of a tyre bursting with the report of a pistol under her very eyes. At the sight of this beautiful monster coming snorting along, her eyes shone with excitement, she reloaded her shooter and propelled herself along the wall in a way that was death on knickers.

To her amazed delight, the car slowed down as it approached her, and she was able to take careful aim at its one occupant. This was a dark, rather thick-set man with grave dark eyes that flashed with a smile as a shower of split peas fell with a harmless patter around him.

"Come, you are not much of a shot, little girl, are you?" he said good-naturedly.

"Oh, but I sometimes *do* hit," she explained eagerly. "I hit Mrs. McArfur on the ear—and lots of others!"

The man scarcely seemed to be as interested in these exploits as she had hoped.

"Can you tell me," he said, taking off his cap in a manner that was entrancing to the child's sense of dignity, "if a house called 'The Knowe' is anywhere hereabouts?"

"This house is The Knowe!"

"Oh!" The man in the car stared up at the child on the wall for a full minute without speaking. Then he said in a queer sort of voice—

"It begins to dawn upon me that you are little Betty Seaton."

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"I am Miss Elizabeth Patricia Seaton," returned Betty, much displeased at this reflection upon her size.

"I see. And they don't spend the extra ha'pence for manners in your school, do they?" he asked with another of his smiles that lighted up his otherwise rather heavy face with a fleeting charm.

"I don't go to school. Sometimes Elizabeth teaches me when she can spare the time. And sometimes Dora does. And sometimes nobody. I pick up what I can. I can read quite easily, and say up to four times as easy as breaking eggs."

Having imparted this information, Betty felt, in some mysterious way, more friendly towards the unknown; she tucked away the pea-shooter in her belt and edged nearer to him along the wall. "I love your *bew*tiful car," she said affably. "I'm in hopes that my father will buy us one, but Elizabeth says 'God forbid.' That's cos we once ran over a hen. And Mary says he'll do no sic thing, and if he can keep us out of the workhouse, that's about all!"

"Who is Elizabeth?"

"My mother, of course. I don't always call her Mummy; it's so common. And she told me to stay at the gate and tell everybody that comes to go to Jericho."

The man, with a look on his face that Betty could not interpret, got out of the car and opened wide the gate. Then he lifted the amazed child from the wall and placed her in the enchanted vehicle.

"I don't think she'll send me to Jericho," he said. "You see, I'm your Daddy!"

Betty was actually very nearly silent until they reached the door.

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"Please—*please* don't run over the bantam house!" was all she said as they turned the bend of the drive, and the occupants of the house in question sprang in all directions from beneath the very wheels of the car.

Elizabeth, still writing for dear life at the window of her study, looked up with a startled face as the combined noise of clucking fowls and motor-horn assailed her ears.

"Bless us and save us!" she said very softly, and laid down her pen.

Aunt Tabitha struggled to her feet. "Do I hear the dinner gong?" she asked, but her niece was already past her at the door. And, a moment later, Miss Elizabeth Patricia Seaton with amazed eyes watched this strange person who claimed to be her Daddy spring out of the car and clasp her mother in his arms and kiss her—first her face, and then her beautiful crinkly hair.

Betty knew that Elizabeth's hair was a funny thing to kiss, because the little curls of it tickled your nose. She expected the man to burst out laughing presently—but he did not. With his arm still round her mother, he took her into the house.

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CHAPTER IV

ON leaving Edward, Pandora betook herself back to the cowslip fields with a sixpenny packet of milk chocolate to "do" instead of tea, and with the intention of thinking things over. She did not intend to go back to The Knowe until supper-time, when it was to be hoped that Roger and Elizabeth would have got over the first transports of their meeting. "Not that there will be any transports to speak of," she thought with a little smile of amusement as she snuggled, face downwards, into the fresh young grass. "I have a very distinct idea that Roger is a calm sort of person—he would need be! As for Elizabeth—— Why did Elizabeth marry him? I don't believe she really cares for him. She cares more than anything for her work. I should be the same—at times. Not all the time, like Elizabeth. I can imagine, for instance, being overwhelmed and lost. Elizabeth wouldn't. In the back of her mind she would never quite lose consciousness of her writing, or of the green shadows the sun was making in the grass, or of one bright star glimmering in the sky. There would always be something to preoccupy her mind, as well as love. With me—no! *The* man could stun me and blind me and deafen me to everything but himself, and for the time I'd be his, body and soul. But I should waken—I know I should waken to sense again. Yes, to sense and

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my desire for work and freedom, and find myself bound hand and foot—not to a god, only to a man!

And then? Yes, that's the great conundrum, should I grow to hate, or to tolerate, instead of love?

After all, Elizabeth is the lucky one, looking on with calm, quiet eyes.

Why must one be married for ever? How stupid the world is, making rules for keeping people always the same when the thing is impossible! Change is the keystone of life, yet people are willing to bind themselves to act in direct contradiction to human nature. . . .

And I—I want Edward—because his eyes are blue and his mouth is crooked and his voice is nice and *drawly*, and because all the other girls in St. Brides, and particularly Kate, want him too. But I don't love him any more; and, after a month, I should be bored to death with him and possibly he with me.

The question is, do I want him enough at the present to make him worth while in the future?

Is there anybody, even The One, that I could love enough for that?

Pandora pondered the question for a moment, and found no answer to it. Then, having arrived at no conclusion, and the sun being hot and her conscience untroubled by any touch of remorse for the anxieties which Edward might be expected to be feeling, she fell asleep.

She woke with a start as the bells in the old tower down in the town were ringing half-past seven, and instantly she remembered that she had forgotten all Elizabeth's messages, including the whisky and the invitation to Edward to supper.

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She did not worry. Pandora never worried about anything. Both she and Elizabeth believed that that way lay wrinkles, a ruined digestion and premature old age. On the whole they acted up to their convictions with commendable consistency.

Pandora rose to her feet now with a little shiver; the still heat of the May day was gone and a faint breeze stirred the long grasses by the river. "After all, what does it matter?" she said to herself philosophically. "If Elizabeth wants things for supper she can always ring up. As for the whisky—Roger can't want a drink the instant he arrives. If he does, it will do him good to wait!" She shook out the thin black garment to which Mrs. Mackenzie so strongly objected, and, looking round for her hat, suddenly remembered that it, too, had been forgotten.

"Oh Lord!" moaned Pandora—"that settles it. I'll have to go back and fetch it and the whisky and Edward all three home to supper!"

But she was not ill pleased to have the excuse, nevertheless. It was not more than a quarter of an hour's walk back to The Queen's House, and she strolled along thoughtfully. The evening was very fine, with a daffodil yellow sky in the west where the sun was sinking. The hills behind it were the deep colour of ripe grapes, and the sea was a cold, still blue. The larks had ceased singing, but it seemed as if the summer's evening were articulate with the song of the blackbirds. And a cuckoo, that bird of birds for wakening all kinds of restless longings in the heart of man, was in the beechwood away behind The Knowe. Its plaintive, insistent note followed Pandora all the way down the

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hill, calling her and urging her into the way of temptation.

She only lost it when she had turned into Abbey Street, and was opening the door of Edward's house.

Once more she walked up the shallow oak stairs and entered his room. It was empty.

She had expected him, somehow, to be still sitting there where she had left him, and the sight of the empty room which had obviously been tidied up by his housekeeper disconcerted her.

She rang the bell, and presently Mrs. Smiley came breathing heavily up the stairs.

She disliked Miss Pandora thoroughly, but she was always studiously agreeable to her as she was to all the ladies who were "after Mr. Edward," foreseeing with terror the day when one of them should catch him and thus end her comfortable supremacy in the old house in Abbey Street for ever.

From behind the green baize door that led through the front hall to her own premises at the back she had already seen Pandora and watched her resentfully as she passed up the stairs. She had made a few horrible remarks to her niece who helped in the kitchen, and when the bell rang she put on her violet silk apron, settled her cap upon her sparse grey hair and a smile upon her fat face, and lumbered up the stairs.

"The idea, Miss Pandora!" she began as she entered the room—"to think of you just walking up like! And me not to know!"

"To walk up seemed a fairly natural mode of progression, and as I did not ring the door-bell there was no reason why you should know, Mrs. Smiley," returned

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Pandora, who had a very strong feeling that the housekeeper needed keeping in her place. "I want to know where Mr. Rattray has gone to."

"He left no word with me, miss," returned Mrs. Smiley, who was aware that her master had gone down to the station to meet the train with the evening papers, and that he might be back at any minute.

"Did he say if he would be back to dinner?"

"He said nothing to the contrary, miss, so I suppose he will be."

Pandora pondered. Supposing that he had gone down to the Club, he might not be back for another half hour, and it was already time that she was back at The Knowe.

"I'll write a message for him," she said, "and leave it on the mantelpiece, where he'll find it directly he gets in."

"Impidence!" was what Mrs. Smiley ejaculated beneath her breath. "Allow me to get you a sheet of paper, then, miss. I know what Mr. Edward likes touched and what he likes left!" was what she said aloud.

"Oh, don't trouble," returned Pandora coolly. "I'll touch nothing that's too sacred, I assure you—and now don't let me keep you! Good evening, Mrs. Smiley."

Mrs. Smiley withdrew in silent fury, and Pandora sat down at the writing table and dashed off two lines.

"DEAR EDWARD,

"I have been thinking. Come up to supper as soon as you've read this and we'll talk again. Don't forget the whisky.

"PANDORA."

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She put it in an envelope and stuck it up on the clock on the mantelpiece, and went out and finally reached the top of the hill, but she was lost in thought so many fathoms deep that she passed the lane leading down to The Knowe without noticing it.

Dusk was falling, and the wide, empty road stretched before her; a wood, black as ebony, cut into the clear evening sky on the horizon; a star like a faint rose lamp glimmered above it.

She stopped suddenly, for she heard, coming along the road behind her, footsteps—the heavy, leisurely tread of a man, and, turning, she saw a dark figure still a good way behind her. She had been thinking of Edward; the fact was, though she had told him to come to-night, she had by no means made up her mind about him, and was little more prepared to answer him than she had been when she fell asleep in the cowslip field. Now, at sight of this approaching figure a sudden, freakish idea occurred to her—he should be the arbitrator of her fate. In these parts it was the custom with the country people to pass the time of day in meeting on the road; the townspeople, on the other hand, would pass without a word.

"Now," said Pandora, watching him draw near, "if he doesn't speak I'll marry Edward. If he does, I won't!"

She gave a little laugh, and with the feeling that she had entirely shifted the responsibility on to the shoulders of the unconscious man, she withdrew into the gateway of an adjoining field and, leaning against it, waited serenely.

As he came nearer she knew quite certainly that she

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hoped he would speak. Presently, through the gathering dusk, she saw, rather to her surprise, that he was neither the farm labourer nor the shop-lad that she had expected, but a gentleman. He was strolling leisurely with his eyes on the ground, and he was either not aware of her presence or it failed to interest him, for as he came up to her he did not raise his eyes.

As for Pandora—her heart gave a great leap. He was level with her, almost past her, when she put out her hand with an unconscious gesture and stopped him. "Forgive me," she said in a voice that shook a little, "would you mind telling me what time it is."

Before he spoke, even before he looked up, she knew that her memory had not played her false. He started, having been quite unaware of her presence, glanced at her, took out his watch and consulted the white face in the waning light. Then he looked at her again, and, catching his breath, paused for just one moment before he answered her, arrested perhaps by the picture she made standing back by the gate with the dusky field behind her and starry white flowers at her feet. They were only daisies, but the twilight lent them mystery, as it lent mystery to her eyes and her black hair and her straight, slender figure. So that she seemed to him, for that one moment, more like a soulless beautiful creature from the shade of the black woods beyond than a living girl.

As long as he lived, he was never to forget that fleeting impression, though in an instant it had passed, and he was smiling at her and trying to see her face more plainly, for she might be like a woodland nymph or anything else out of fairyland, but she was also very

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like a human girl he had once met, beautiful enough to charm the heart out of a man, and who had very nearly—— However, that was an episode of the past, to be looked back upon now from a safe distance with a feeling of gratitude for a danger escaped, yet not without a sober sense of regret for the delicious madness that for a brief space had overwhelmed him.

An episode upon which he would not allow himself to look back too often, at all.

"It is almost a quarter to nine," he said after a minute's pause.

She did not thank him but stood staring at him with a startled face, and when she spoke, the words were not what she had meant to say at all.

"I believe you are Roger," she said.

In the dusk, and some paces from her as he was, he could not see her half shocked, half frightened expression, but the tone of her voice surprised him and he drew nearer.

"Yes—Roger Seaton. But who——" he broke off. "How stupid I am! Of course you are Elizabeth's little girl grown up—Pandora! Somehow I never thought of finding you here, or of you being grown up at all."

"I am twenty-three."

"You were only a child when Elizabeth and I were married—fifteen, I think it was, and I was jealous of you, though I had never seen you." His voice was amused and kindly — as though he were laughing at both himself and her. Perhaps he marvelled now at these love-sick follies of the past—Pandora wondered.

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"Yes, madly jealous," he went on, still in the same light, bantering tone—"and not without good reason, for the little schoolgirl I had never seen was my rival in the affections of Elizabeth!"

He laughed, and Pandora laughed too, but each was conscious of a sense of embarrassment, difficult to shake off. As they walked down the road together towards The Knowe his mind was busy. It was odd how she reminded him of that episode of three years ago. Perhaps when he saw her in the full light the likeness would vanish. He hoped to God that it was only a likeness. He longed to have a good square look at her, and it did not escape him that this was the very thing she seemed anxious to prevent. Stupidly anxious, since in a few minutes at most they must be face to face in the light.

"It seems to me that we must have met all the same," he said abruptly, turning to her.

"Have we? But I shouldn't have forgotten." Her voice was indifferent; her face averted from his questioning gaze.

"No—you wouldn't have forgotten," he agreed, after a momentary pause, and wished he had not said it. "Have you been abroad much?" he persisted.

"I studied art in Paris. Did you think you had met me there?" she asked innocently.

"No. It was not there at all. Never mind, Miss —— By the way, what am I to call you?"

"Pandora, of course. That's my name, and I have got no other. Aunt Tabitha gave me hers long ago, but as soon as I reached years of discretion I gave it back to her. Pandora Lorrimer doesn't fit. Besides,

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I suppose you know that I consider myself at least half a Spaniard."

Captain Seaton smiled in the dusk.

"Yes—so I have heard," he said. "And as if I did not know your romantic history already from Elizabeth, I have heard it all over again from Betty!"

His light, amused tones offended her, for there was no subject on earth about which she was so touchy as about the solemn subject of her birth. It was very nearly sacred to her. And the belief that she was of Spanish descent and nobly born was as dear to her as the hope of Heaven to a Christian martyr.

For a few minutes they walked on in silence. It was Pandora who broke it by asking in a stiff, conversational voice, "Did you find Elizabeth much changed?"

Evidently quite unaware of having given offence, he turned to her with real pleasure. "As a matter of fact," he said, "I have scarcely seen her yet; but—from the little I have seen I should say that she has not changed at all, and she is quite as full of the same maddening inconsistencies as she was on the day I left her."

"Elizabeth inconsistent!" exclaimed Pandora in great surprise. "Don't you know how clever she is? Don't you ever read her stories? She may only write for *Williams*, but they are *quite* as good as any ordinary novels, if not better. 'The World and His Wife' had to be reprinted."

"I have read it. Came out in a paper back, didn't it, costing sixpence? It is one of her greatest inconsistencies, surprisingly clever and gorgeously absurd. Even if she hadn't put her name to it and sent me a

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copy with the author's love written across the title-page, I should still have guessed that she had written it. Every line of it betrays her."

"Oh," said Pandora, beginning to feel more at her ease, "I wonder if you are clever!"

"Not a bit. One clever person in a small house is enough. Comfort demands that the rest should be commonplace—by the way, you don't live with us now, do you?"

"Does that mean that you think it would interfere with the comfort of the house if I did?" enquired Pandora with her usual readiness to turn the conversation into a purely personal channel.

"I imagine that might be your aim, but I am not going to flatter you by saying so, my dear!" thought Roger. Aloud, he said—"I am afraid I meant nothing but a desire to have my curiosity gratified. I know that Elizabeth, or the absurd creature she calls Aunt Tabitha, or both of them together, adopted you, and that their home was yours in consequence. But I seem to recollect that Elizabeth wrote me a three-volume letter a year or two ago explaining that you had reached years of indiscretion and were what's called 'on your own' on the strength of it."

Pandora explained.

"After I came home from Paris—rather more than a year ago it is now—Elizabeth let me have my choice. Elizabeth is always sweet in these ways, and reasonable."

Roger nodded silently. He knew these "sweet reasonable ways" of his wife's. They had occasionally left him distinctly wishing for something rather less broadminded. For Captain Seaton had all the con-

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ventional outlook of a Service man accustomed to the beaten track; Elizabeth was a Bohemian.

Pandora went gaily on, unconscious of the critic at her side——

"She said I might go on living with them at The Knowe, or I might have rooms of my own, just as I liked. Of course I chose the latter, and Elizabeth agreed at once. Everyone has a perfect right to lead their own life according to their own ideas, she holds."

His eyebrows went up. "Quite a dangerous little creed that," he said.

"She believes in freedom of thought and action, and in shaping one's individuality on one's own lines accordingly."

"Lord!" murmured Roger very softly; however, he felt devoutly thankful that Elizabeth's individuality did not seek to express itself in the wearing of Greek draperies and sandals.

"And of course I agree with her," continued Pandora. "I have a tiny income of my own, you see. Enough to let me have a flat at Priorsgate, just very nearly opposite—but that doesn't matter," she broke off abruptly, and added, "It's at the top of Abbey Street."

Captain Seaton was perfectly certain that if he had ever had a sister she would not have been allowed to live in a flat by herself at the age of twenty-three.

"What do you do when you are nervous, or lonely, or have a headache?" he asked with a glance, half amused, at the lithe dark figure stepping along by his side.

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"But I never have headaches, and I'm never lonely or nervous either. What's there to be nervous of in a flat of four rooms? Besides, I am on the telephone; and there's always Marianna and Edward. . . ."

"Who are——?"

Pandora interrupted him calmly. "Edward is the person who lives very nearly opposite," she said. "He is by way of being a doctor what time he can spare from the golf links. As for Marianna—her real name is Mary Ann, but I can't endure the combination. She lives in the kitchen, and breaks the dishes, and puts so much salt in the food that almost always I have to eat at The Knowe. Oh——" She broke off with a sudden exclamation of horror. "Talking of food—what are you doing wandering out here on the road at this hour? Elizabeth said something about supper at eight. And the horrible part of the thing is that I was to get something—crabs, or cold ham—it doesn't much matter, for I forgot all about it. Aren't you desperately hungry?"

"Well, yes," he answered, "to be frank with you, that does about describe the state of the inner man at the present moment. The fact is that except for a cup of tea and a water biscuit, which Betty shared with me on arrival, I last saw food at 12.30 to-day in Edinburgh, when I"—he paused for a moment—"had lunch with a friend."

"Then why aren't you eating now? What is Elizabeth doing?" Her tone of indignant sympathy was as if the blame of the forgotten supper lay not with herself but with Elizabeth.

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"Oh, Elizabeth is cooking up odds and ends into a stew. It seems that the cook is out."

"She is not only the cook, she is everything. You remember Mary?"

Yes, he remembered Mary. A firebrand of a woman with red hair, devoted to Elizabeth and, oddly enough, also to the unattractive Aunt Tabitha.

"You surely can't mean that Elizabeth finds that one servant is enough on which to work a house like The Knowe?" he asked.

"If he is going to worry about servants——" thought Pandora. "I don't know about *enough*, but you see Elizabeth hates being bothered; the more servants you keep, the more troubles you have," she explained. "We had another once, but she ate two pounds of butter in three days and broke a teapot, and she and Mary quarrelled, and Mary turned her out and locked the kitchen door on her. She went to law about that. Her name was Jennet. Didn't you hear about it?"

Roger confessed that the story had never reached his ears.

"Well, we lost the case. Elizabeth did. She had to pay £5, and costs. What it was for, I don't believe she ever knew. I don't myself, but we were the talk of the place."

Captain Seaton listened silently, without a suspicion that Pandora was talking nervously, hurriedly, against time as it were, to divert his attention from herself. He had no difficulty in believing what she said; Elizabeth had always managed to make herself talked about, however innocent she was in intention. It was high time that he was home again, he thought, for from what

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he had already seen and heard of it, The Knowe wanted someone at its head other than Elizabeth, with her mind full of novels, and crazy old Aunt Tabitha.

And now there was this girl, a force with which he had not thought to reckon, walking along by his side with her head held high and with a foreign grace of carriage that reminded him most poignantly of that episode of three years ago in a wild, forsaken corner of Spain—— Reminded him so strongly that he only wanted a good square look at her to make sure. . . . But each time he turned to look at her, her head was averted, or her face was downcast, by accident or design, it was impossible to say.

"And that reminds me," she broke in on his musings with an exclamation of annoyance—"I was to have borrowed a bottle of whisky from Edward Rattray for your supper, and I forgot that too. And now, unless he comes along and brings it with him, there is nothing in the house for you to drink but cocoa—Van Houten's. And I have left my hat lying on the table in his room—practically the only hat I have—not that it matters as much as your whisky. What must you think of me—of Elizabeth too, for it was quite as much her fault as mine for forgetting?"

He smiled. "I am ready to forgive you both," he said. "The truth is, I was perfectly certain there would be no whisky in the house, so I brought some with me. I haven't been married to Elizabeth and had these homecomings at intervals for eight years for nothing."

They were nearing home now, and the walk was nearly over. "I'm glad!" said Pandora with more fervour than the matter of the whisky seemed to demand.

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"By the way," she said, "how was it that you motored up? Have you got a car?"

He shook his head. "No. But quite by chance I met a lady in Edinburgh to-day that I used to know years ago in Gib.—Mrs. Miles. I had lunch with her. Oddly enough, it seems that she lives up here, at a place called Fairview. No doubt you know her?"

"We know her slightly," returned Pandora with an air of hauteur which amused him, until she added by way of explanation, "Mrs. Miles is one of the people here who disapprove of Elizabeth and me most strongly—so strongly, in fact, that she is quite blind to our presence if there is anyone else there who might see her bowing."

"She did not strike me as being that sort at all," he replied vexedly. "She seemed a kind little woman, and she spoke nicely of Elizabeth to me."

"She would be kind to you, I'm sure," replied Pandora sweetly, "and tell you how charming she thinks Elizabeth—nasty, detestable, odious snob!" she added to herself vindictively. "And so she motored you up?" she asked, after a pause.

"No. She lent me her car. She has been staying in Edinburgh for a few days consulting a doctor. There's something the matter with her heart, and she did not feel up to the long drive back. So she was glad enough to take train and let me run it back for her; otherwise she would have had to send for her chauffeur. I am sorry you don't like her," he added. "I somehow hoped she and Elizabeth were friends."

"Perhaps they may be when the millennium comes round!" replied Pandora cheerfully. They were at The Knowe as she spoke, and they turned in at the

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gate up an avenue bordered on either side by flowering shrubs that grew without let or hindrance in their own sweet way. Down in St. Brides beneath them the clock on the old tower struck nine; the solemn, deep tones smote on the evening calm. A bat, silent as a shadow, swooped by, so close, the wing of it fanned Pandora's cheek as lightly as a cobweb. Then an owl called and flew past them out of the dusk.

"It lives in the hollow of the big beech tree," the girl explained.

"It seems that an imp of sorts haunts the place too," remarked Roger. "It can't be——"

He stopped short, for across the lawn in front of them, following the eerie hoot, flitted a small figure, all white, quiet as a moonbeam; the little feet in the grass made no sound or rustle.

"It is only Betty; she is by way of hunting owls," Pandora explained.

"In the name of goodness!" ejaculated Betty's father, "what is Elizabeth about to allow it? Won't she catch her death of cold?"

"Oh, Betty never catches her death of anything," returned Pandora tranquilly. "She is perfectly hardy, and Elizabeth finds it difficult to stop her doing things she is really *set* on doing. Betty! Betty!" she broke off in the same unconcerned voice; "come here, you naughty, tiresome child!"

But they had to follow the little girl to the beech tree, where she had climbed into the branches and was groping in the hollow for the owl that had long since flown out of it. The tree, standing out grotesque and twisted with age against the dim sky, and the pale elfish face of

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the child looking down at them through a bush of curly hair, reminded Roger of one of Rackham's fanciful illustrations, and he smiled even whilst he asked in a severe tone why she had not come when she was called. And he determined, if it was part of Elizabeth's plan to allow their child, aged seven, freedom to act according to her own ideas, it would have to be put a stop to, and the sooner the better.

But Betty looked down at him with eyes so like the eyes of Elizabeth herself that he found himself smiling back into them, and his smile broadened when she answered him with the utmost composure:

"It wasn't so very convenient, daddy! And there! I've just missed him by half a tick—could anyfing be more 'noying?"

"Well, come down now and get back to bed."

"Sorry, daddy, but I can't stir! My nighty's caught on a hook of the tree, and here I'll have to stay, I s'pect, till someone climbs up and fetches me!"

"Not you! Unhook your nighty at once, and lean over, and I'll lift you."

"Sorry, daddy——"

"Do as I tell you!"

To the surprise of Betty, she found herself obeying. It was very odd, and she pondered deeply on the oddness of it all the way to the house—a journey which she took upon the shoulder of her daddy. But at the front door she reasserted herself, and said with dignity:

"I'm starting to collect owls. Stamps is tiresome things and terribly common. Nobody we know has got stuffed owls. Edward says he once knew a person who had one with a mouse in his mouth. The mouse was

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stuffed too. I s'pose you haven't got such a thing about you as a whale's *toof*, have you? That would be an interesting thing."

Captain Seaton thought ruefully of a beautiful baby doll, whose clothes came off and on, purchased in London the day before. Somehow the gift seemed a strangely inappropriate one to lay before the small, self-possessed person perched upon his shoulder.

They had reached the front door now. It stood open to greet them, and at the top of the steps stood Elizabeth with Edward Rattray beside her.

Elizabeth ran down the flight of steps and slipped her hand through Roger's arm.

"I've really got quite a decent supper all but ready," she said. "Aren't you famished?"

Edward stood perfectly still watching them; his usually debonair appearance changed to a sort of restrained impatience that showed itself in the crooked line of his close-shut mouth.

Elizabeth was scolding Betty. Roger was smiling, and forgiving her. And Pandora—Pandora's head was bent; she would not look at Edward or at anyone.

At the top of the steps, Elizabeth said:

"Oh, Roger, I don't believe you have ever met Edward before. He has come to supper and brought you some whisky. His other name is Rattray."

But before Roger spoke to Edward at all, he turned and looked straight at Pandora, whom he could see plainly at last.

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CHAPTER V

SUPPER was a jovial meal.

Elizabeth was radiant. She had a dab of flour on her forehead; her hair was gorgeously untidy, and she wore a French negligé the colour of gold chrysanthemums. She had completely forgotten the unfinished Part I. of her novel, and as the meal proceeded, her spirits rose higher and higher. Her eyes sparkled like jewels; her laughter rang out gay and unsubdued.

Roger sat beside her. Beneath the table his foot sought hers in its little beaded slipper and pressed it. The contact reassured and comforted him. Illogically enough, it made him believe that she loved him in spite of the oddness of his home-coming and the casualness of his welcome; and he tried to be gay too, and to make-believe that this was exactly what he had wanted and pictured to himself during the years that he had been away from her. He tried to make himself believe, too, that it added to his happiness that Edward Rattray, of whose existence two hours ago he had scarcely been aware, should be there, sitting at the end of the table as gay now as Elizabeth herself, and making not the slightest effort to hide the fact that he was many fathoms deep in love with Pandora.

Pandora—yes, there was Pandora too; and never in his wildest imaginings had it occurred to him that one

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small indiscretion of three years ago, which had long ceased to occupy his mind, could come home to roost or claim from him one regret. But there she was, opposite to him, ten times more beautiful than he remembered her; alluring too, with her air of being different from other people. Every time he looked at her—and, in spite of himself, he found his gaze straying in her direction again and again—it was to find her dark enigmatic eyes upon him.

Elizabeth, thrown upon her own resources, had made a stew. What the ingredients were, goodness alone knew! Roger identified a sardine upon his plate, as well as a large piece of tinned salmon, half an egg, a piece of fat, and several different kinds of vegetables. But there were other things too, unrecognizable and strange. The mixture floated in a dark, rich gravy, of which Elizabeth appeared to be unaccountably proud.

Pandora, in the quarter of an hour that had elapsed before the food was put upon the table, had "tossed off something with cheese in it," but whether the cheese was at fault or the manner of its "tossing," none could say. Its looks were against it, and the only one to partake of it was Edward, who did his best out of deference to its maker.

Elizabeth gave her share to Silas, who sat on a chair between her and Aunt Tabitha and begged all the time.

Through the half-open door, Roger could hear Betty hovering in the hall and pattering with naked feet up and down the passage. He knew that the child was in her nightgown, and that the front door was open, letting in a decidedly chilly breeze off the sea. The matter worried him, and he mentioned it to his wife.

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"Oughtn't the child to be sent to bed?" he asked.

But Elizabeth shook her head and laughed.

"Botheration take her! Of course she ought, but she won't go," she said. "I promised her a sardine out of the stew, and she is waiting for the pudding too. That's the pudding over there, covered with jam. Help it, Dora, Honey! I used to wait for the pudding too, exactly the same when I was a kid. So did Dora. Didn't we, Aunt Tabby?"

Aunt Tabitha, thus appealed to, had a choking fit, for her mouth was full of bread and honey. Edward slapped her on the back—a proceeding which effected a cure but made her furiously angry, for she was in what Elizabeth called "one of her moods." Moreover, she almost always imagined Edward to be a footman, and resented his sitting down to table with herself in consequence.

Whilst she fumed and scolded, Silas barked and Elizabeth laughed—not that there was much to laugh at, but she was happy, and the world was young, and it was nice to have Roger home again, and she loved Pandora and Edward.

"And that reminds me——"

She sprank to her feet and rapped loudly on the table to command silence. No one was talking at the moment but Aunt Tabitha, who was muttering and mumbling to herself about a person called John. She stopped short and pulled herself up with a jerk, straightened her lace cap with her bony, twisted fingers, and fixed her eyes greedily upon the pudding in the centre of the table.

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"Silence!" Elizabeth commanded once more; and she looked round on the little company.

She was almost certain that Edward was holding Pandora's hand beneath the table, and she smiled at them as one who would say, "Bless you, my children!"

"I have got something to announce!" she cried. "Fill your glasses and drink to the health of my little Pandora and Edward. They are engaged to be married! Idiots—both of you! and quite unsuited to matrimony and respectability. Pandora—I mean—that is——. However, here's luck, and I hope you'll be happy!"

She raised her glass, half full of whisky and soda, and drank it off, then threw her arms round Pandora and kissed her.

Edward got up slowly. He looked dazed, as if the sun were in his eyes, but they were bluer than ever, and his mouth was very crooked. He looked straight over Pandora's head at Elizabeth.

"If that's true," he said a trifle huskily, "I—I am very happy, and lucky; but it seems almost too good——"

Elizabeth nodded and smiled at him, and held out the hand that was not holding Pandora, and drew him to her too.

"It's *perfectly* true," she told him. "You may believe it, Edward. She confessed just now in the kitchen where she was making the cheese omelet, and that's why it's so bad that no one can eat it. Yes, she really means it, and I hope you'll both be happy; you ought to be, for you are only a couple of sillies at the best!"

She dried her eyes on Pandora's hair and beamed. Pandora disengaged herself and sat down again with

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a flushed face. She would not look at Edward, or Elizabeth, or anyone She was acutely conscious that Roger's eyes were upon her. No one else seemed to matter.

"You really *are* too bad, Elizabeth," she said in deep vexation. "I wish to goodness I hadn't told you a thing! As a matter of fact we are not engaged yet at all. Edward knows that. I only said that we might be going to be; and now I have a very good mind not to be at all——"

"Honey!" cried Elizabeth with a world of reproach in her voice. "You told me——"

"I told you he had asked me, and I had more or less refused, but that I had thought things over and decided——"

"Well? And didn't I send you out into the garden to find him and tell him supper was ready? Surely that was time enough for you to fix up anything under the sun!"

"Elizabeth!" broke in Roger, who had been sitting through this altercation looking thoroughly miserable. "I really must protest! You are putting us all in a most horrible situation. We have finished supper; let us go into another room!"

"I've had no pudding!" wailed Aunt Tabitha.

"Well, stay behind and eat it," snapped Elizabeth. She was flushed and angry, and she stalked out of the room in her French negligé, looking like an offended empress.

Pandora had tears in her eyes, but they enhanced her beauty so wonderfully that Roger would not believe they were genuine. It was Edward who had his sympathy.

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He did not look as if the sun were in his eyes any more, and he sat down again at the table and helped Aunt Tabitha to pudding, whilst Pandora and Elizabeth went out. Roger followed them. He heard Elizabeth say:

"Dora, you are absolutely enough to drive a saint mad!" Then she went into the study and banged the door, and locked it.

Pandora turned to him with a little deprecating smile. "It's Elizabeth's *enthusiasm*," she said. "She knows perfectly well——" She stopped short and, taking a rose-coloured scarf from the hall table wound it round her throat. "I'm going home," she added.

"But you can't go without a word to Rattray," protested Roger. "Surely you owe him some sort of an explanation. Are you engaged to him, or are you not?"

"I really don't know," she replied calmly, looking at him with her beautiful, puzzling eyes. "Must I decide now?"

"Yes—you really must." He spoke sternly, but he was miserably conscious that he was softening under the influence of her slow, quiet voice and the pathetic look in her eyes. "You really must," he repeated. "Surely you must see for yourself——"

"Oh yes, I see," she assured him, "only I so hate having to decide things. I don't want to marry him. I don't want to let him go. It's terrible——"

"I am afraid you'll have to make up your mind to one course or the other," he replied drily. "But it seems to me, if you are as lukewarm as all that about it, your decision is made already. But why, in God's name, should you tell Elizabeth——"

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She came a step nearer, searching his face.

"Because—surely you know, surely you understand? But you don't! You only despise me. I see it in your face."

He broke in protesting, but she scarcely seemed to hear him.

"You may be very sure," she said, "that if I marry Edward it is because it is the best thing I can do."

"Whilst Edward has to pay the piper——"

"Well, someone must. You won't, at any rate, Captain Seaton."

Why should he? Why should anyone? That was the maddening question to which he could not find a satisfactory answer. One day's pleasure, entered upon without a thought for the consequences, and stopped, so he thought, before any harm was done. Yet here was the trivial, half-forgotten thing raked up now to his discomfiture.

"You are going to tell Elizabeth?" she asked, a shade of anxiety in her voice.

He regarded her sombrely. "Do you think it likely I should tell her?" he asked. "No, set your mind at rest; I shall not tell her that we have met before."

She breathed a sigh of relief.

"She doesn't even know I have ever been in Spain at all. And now, please send Edward to me. He may see me home."

She held out her hand to him as she spoke and smiled. Her smile was so charming that it upset every theory he had formed about her and made him feel himself to be a prejudiced fool.

"Look here," he said, with a change of tone, "we must

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talk about this some other time. This is scarcely the place. May I come and see you some day at your flat?"

"Why, to be sure! Come when you like," she assented.

He went, then, and fetched Edward; and as he saw them walk off together he felt more kindly disposed to Pandora, though if he had tried to think it out he would have found it hard to find a reason for this modification of his feelings.

He did not, however, seek for reasons. He went back into the house, thinking not of Pandora at all, or of Edward, but of Elizabeth. Hearing voices in the dining-room he looked in, but there was no one there but Aunt Tabitha, slowly eating pudding and holding polite conversation with an imaginary guest whom she addressed as Duchess.

Elizabeth's study door was locked.

He knocked at it gently, and, after a minute, she opened to him.

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CHAPTER VI

ROGER woke the next morning with the feeling that there was a cloud on his horizon. So small, that at first he could not locate it. By-and-by he traced it to Pandora, and he remembered that he had promised to go and see her even whilst he recognized that he had better keep away from her. "I don't trust her; these half-foreign-looking women are the very devil!" he said to himself as he shaved before the little mirror in his dressing-room. "I am glad Elizabeth is different."

A few minutes later he put on his coat and walked into their bedroom where Elizabeth was sitting with her hair hanging down and staring absently at her own reflection in the glass.

A photograph of Pandora stood on the dressing table —Pandora taken in the somewhat daring, but extremely becoming costume of a Spanish dancer; smiling too, with much the same look of injured innocence in her eyes with which she had upset his ideas of her last night. The smile did not go with the dress, yet he felt a little thrill of shame, or of pity, as if he had unexpectedly come face to face with someone he had wronged.

He took up the photograph and studied it carefully.

"Is this like Pandora?" he asked his wife.

"Why, you know!" mumbled Elizabeth, with three hairpins in her mouth. "You saw her last night—what are you thinking of?"

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"Oh, I know it is like her in face—beautiful, and all the rest of it. What I mean is, is it like her character?"

He put the photograph back in its place. "She is a remarkably lovely girl," he added reluctantly.

"Yes, isn't she?" agreed his wife, warmly. She finished doing her hair hurriedly, for the gong had already rung for breakfast, and her mind had flown beyond the meal to her writing. She wondered if by any chance she could manage a chapter that morning. Roger put a hand on her shoulder. "Hurry up, my dear," he said. "The bacon and eggs will be cold. We won't worry about Pandora's character."

"Good heavens!" thought Elizabeth; "I only pray there *is* bacon and eggs! I had forgotten he likes it every morning of his life. I only hope there is anything in particular at all!" She dropped a hurried kiss on the back of his hand—it was one of her gestures, that, and a way she had of dismissing trouble. "As for Pandora's character!" she exclaimed, "it never occurred to me to worry about that—it's all right. Pandora's a dear. I love her. I couldn't live a day without her. You are bothered about our quarrel last night, I suppose? It meant nothing. We often quarrel. We are as different as fire and water, chalk and cheese—any other opposites you like, though I don't know which of us stands for which. Find me a clean handky, like a dear—no, not that drawer—*not that drawer!*—the little one on the left."

Roger rummaged carefully through a chaotic mass of ribbons, laces, gloves, letters, and other rubbish, till he found a little lilac handkerchief, just the colour of the blouse which Elizabeth was at that moment contorting

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herself to fasten down the back. "I am not a bit bothered about your quarrel of last night," he said. "It's just that—well, I suppose I am prejudiced against Pandora. Unreasonable, of course. Most prejudices are."

It cost him an effort to say it.

Elizabeth only laughed. "Well, I am ready!" she announced. "How nice it is to have you to go downstairs with once more! I don't believe I shall let you go away again—never, never, never! A house isn't properly furnished without a man in it. It's like a drawing-room without a sofa. One of my early recollections is of Aunt Tab saying that long, long, long ago in her rakish days!"

They were downstairs by this time, arm in arm, and as they reached the dining-room door Elizabeth returned to the subject of Pandora.

"And it is most unreasonable of you, and ridiculous," she said, "to dislike my little Pandora. I thought men were above these silly prejudices. So get over it quick, for you are sure to see her every day. This is her home, you know, though she does live in a foolish flat and paint pictures that——. However," she broke off, "you will see her pictures and judge of them for yourself, Roger!"

They sat down to breakfast. The room was sunlit, and a great bowl of cowslips stood in the middle of the table.

Aunt Tabitha, who disliked waiting for meals, had already begun on a plate of porridge thickly covered with brown sugar. Betty, clad in a clean holland overall, was dividing her attentions and scraps of bread

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soaked in milk between a sullen tortoise and a hedgehog who refused to unroll.

"This animal's enough to drive a body crazy," she remarked. "I've offered him slugs—beauties—and caterpillars, and now milk, and he *won't* open out! Daddy, have you any experience of hedgehogs?"

"Only they are best left to forage for themselves in the garden," returned Roger, wondering if the slugs and caterpillars were concealed at the moment on the person of his daughter.

Elizabeth poured out:

"The immediate question is what would you like to do to-day?" she remarked with a smiling glance that seemed to include not only Aunt Tabitha and Betty in the question, but the sullen tortoise and the hedgehog, too.

"The first thing for me to do is to run Mrs. Miles' car on to Fairview," answered Roger.

"Oh, Daddy!" breathed Betty, "when I said my prayers last night I asked God that this might happen——"

"So don't destroy her infant faith," said Elizabeth cordially. "I have forgotten about your tea—how many lumps?"

"None, thanks. Of course you'll both come—you and Betty."

"Oh, gorgeous!" murmured Betty, beaming with joy. "Elizabeth, Precious! as it's a holiday, mayn't I, this one little time, leave my porridge!"

"Leave anything you like, child. The room, too, dear. I want to talk to Daddy; and, anyway, it will do you more good to eat your food in the garden."

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Betty departed, carrying her animals in her overall, and with a slice of bread and honey impaled upon the back of the hedgehog. In the other hand was a mug of tea.

Aunt Tabitha remained, appearing to notice neither of them. She hummed a little ditty in a creaking, hoarse voice, and followed the manœuvres of an early wasp that had got caught in the marmalade with eager gaze.

"The thing is," began Elizabeth, "I perfectly hate having to disappoint you, Roger, but wild horses wouldn't drag me inside Mrs. Miles' gate——"

"Why on earth——" began Roger; but she interrupted him vehemently.

"There you have me—I can scarcely tell you—just *because!* That's all. Will you have an egg? To-morrow there shall be bacon, too."

He helped himself, looking bewildered, as men are apt to do when confronted with the strange loves and hates of their womenfolk.

"Don't you like her?" he asked. "What has she done?"

"I hate her. At least, I despise and detest her! As to *done*——" Words failed Elizabeth, and she took a piece of toast. "Don't ask me to come. That's all!" she said.

"Well, I won't," said Roger, "but I'm uncommonly sorry. She seemed to like you——"

"Oh, she bows occasionally, and so on," Elizabeth admitted carelessly.

"How do you mean—bows occasionally?"

"Occasionally means every now and then. When she

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can't possibly help it without making it a direct cut. Lots of people have reduced the occasional bow to a fine art. But why bother? Is your tea nice?"

"Yes—but Elizabeth, this worries me. I don't understand it."

"Neither do we—Pandora and I. But it doesn't exactly distress us. After all, if one could understand everything, I expect the Millennium would take place next week, and nobody wants that! So take the car back by yourself and Betty, and be done with it."

"But, Elizabeth, there is more in this than you are willing to make out. I must get to the bottom of it!"

"What a boy it is! I remember you always did want to see the wheels go round! What's perturbing you?"

"Well, my dear—this Mrs. Miles, I've known her for a year or so, off and on, and always liked her. May you not be imagining things?"

"May be! May be, too, she didn't realize that I was the wife of the fascinating Captain Seaton she knew over at Gib——"

"She seemed to me such a sweet woman! I must say I was pleased to meet her again yesterday!"

"Oh, *sweet!*" commented Elizabeth with scorn. "My *dear* Roger!—you a commander in the Navy and been round the world, and yet don't know what a power of mischief these sweet women can be up to! A widow, too, and therefore designing! Oh, my dear!"

Elizabeth's laugh, careless and amused, showed that the words were not actuated by jealously.

Roger lighted a cigarette and passed the case to his

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wife. "My dear child," he said, "she is past the designing age. I am quite sure she is at least five years older than I am."

"I am quite sure she is at least ten," returned Elizabeth composedly—"but that don't matter. She may have designs or not—as seemeth to her good. I would not bear her a grudge for that. It would strike me as natural enough. The British Isles, Roger—they may be blessed above other lands, but oh, the scarcity of man has often left me sighing!"

"Poor old Elizabeth! Yet, somehow I should fancy that where you and Pandora are gathered together there will the men be also!"

"Such as they are!" admitted Elizabeth, "but they are really scarcely worth it! Roger, my dear, did you ever realize that unpopularity with the women is the price one has to pay for any little attentions one gets from the nice, kind men?"

"Yes, I have noticed it quite frequently. But there is such a thing as discretion, Elizabeth. You never were very discreet if I remember rightly. It is always a good thing, isn't it, to keep on the right side of your own sex!"

He spoke diffidently, fearing to hurt her feelings by seeming to lecture, yet with a vivid enough recollection of one or two occasions when events had proved that she was not by any manner of means particular as to what terms she was on with the feminine portion of the neighbourhood.

Elizabeth had lived for the last five years of her married life at St. Brides, but Roger had not been there before. His last leave had been spent with her in the

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South of England in order to be near his mother—since dead.

He had hoped that here, in her native place, he would find things different; that Elizabeth would be sought after and popular. He had a horror of his wife being talked about and shunned. Yet, for one reason or another, generally inadequate enough, this had usually been her lot. It did not improve matters in his eyes that she was either oblivious of, or indifferent to it.

She gave a little laugh now that dismissed the matter of discretion as unworthy of consideration.

"And that brings us back to Mrs. Miles," he said. "You see I am a tenacious sort of person, Elizabeth, and I still don't understand why she only 'bows occasionally,' why you detest her, why——"

"Oh, Roger, did I say detest? As though I would waste my time seriously in detesting the likes of her! I am only sorry for her, that's all!"

"Then, my dearest girl, *why*——?"

Elizabeth drew a long breath. "Well, as far as I know, it is this. May I have another cigarette? I like yours a good deal better than my own."

He came over to her side of the table and held the match for her till her cigarette was alight. Then he kissed the top of her head. "Do you know that you are prettier than you were when I married you," he told her, "and quite twice as provoking!"

Elizabeth turned sideways and kissed the strong, sunburnt hand that lay on her shoulder. The very pose of that hand was characteristic. You could trust the owner of it, she meditated, through thick and thin, and, generally, forecast with a fair amount of accuracy just

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how he would act in any given case. Quite often, too, you could guess his opinion before it was uttered.

Elizabeth wondered. She often did a little wondering on Roger's account, and never came to any definite conclusion.

"Well—Mrs. Miles?" he prompted gently but inexorably.

"Yes—Mrs. Miles!" echoed Elizabeth. "I have nothing precisely *tangible* against her. Some people don't like cats, do they? And I once knew a man who fainted at the sight of a spider—not *every* spider, of course," she amended hastily—"but once in a way, or so."

"Elizabeth——"

"Sorry, dear! we were talking of Mrs. Miles and cats, weren't we?

"Well, we came here to live, as you know, five years ago, when the Willoughby's lease of the house was up. I hadn't been here, not for years and years, since I was a kid—fifteen or so. In these days I didn't notice things much, being taken up with Pandora, who was the *loveliest* baby. You wouldn't believe——"

"I quite believe! If this story has any point at all, for mercy's sake keep to it——"

"Of course! I am sorry. Well, after we came back to live I began to remember things, and to understand what I had not understood or thought about before.

"In the old days nobody had known us. Very few people, that is to say, were on calling terms with us. The few there were only came once in a way, as a special treat (to us, I mean, not to them), like jam for tea on Sundays. Do I make myself clear?"

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Roger nodded. Luckily he was a patient man.

"When we came back, five years ago, it was the same, at first. Scarcely anyone came to call. You could count them on your fingers. The Muir Mackenzie women—two terrible old cats, particularly Mrs. Mackenzie, who has countless daughters, all unmarried; a parson or so, clamouring to save our souls; Edward, of course; and one or two others that don't matter.

"The truth began to dawn upon me.

"People actually were drawing the line at poor Aunt Tabitha. Yes, dear, we are talking of you!" Elizabeth broke off to nod and smile at the old creature, who, having finished her breakfast, was watching them through narrowed eyes, a slight smile on her lips. She looked indescribably cunning.

Roger turned his head away.

"You are a wonder, Elizabeth!" he whispered—"I positively believe you are fond of her!"

"She's not a bad old thing!" returned Elizabeth carelessly—"and I am consumed with pity. Look at her now! She may, and does, look painfully like a malevolent Death's Head, but once she had a past—with a capital P. There was a man called John. I know no more for certain. Neither does anybody else, I should think, in St. Brides—but the legend persists. The aroma of wickedness still clings to that ancient skeleton grinning at us from the other end of the table. There's food for reflection there, isn't there?" She fell silent. To his surprise he saw that there were tears in her eyes. He touched her hand gently.

"Go on, dear," he said. "Do you mean to tell me that owing to some problematical past on the part

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of Aunt Tabitha, people won't know you and Pandora?"

"I'm afraid you can't call John problematical; he existed, right enough," smiled Elizabeth, "and whoever he was, and whatever he did, people seemed to have inherited a prejudice against him taken in conjunction with Aunt Tabitha.

"And it was Mrs. Muir whom I have just called a cat who came to our rescue.

"You see she knew my mother, who was years younger than Aunt Tabitha, and, evidently, extremely—well, on the right side of conventionality, for she married one of the Professors at the University; a man with a beard, my dear, who wrote a learned book about stones, that nobody would ever dream of reading. And there's where I get my literary talent!" explained Elizabeth.

Had such a thing been possible the professor would have turned in his grave at this statement. He had regarded even the best of novels with a mild contempt, and Elizabeth's slap-dash and sensational efforts would certainly have filled his soul with anguish.

"Unluckily they both died when I was a kid, and handed me over to Aunt Tabitha," she went on, after a pause, during which she contemplated the old lady with an air both gay and regretful. "And *that's* where I get my queer ideas from, and my ways that people don't like. And the worst of it is, Pandora has got them from me. They must be contagious! And now there's Betty!"

"Get on with your story, my dear. There's got to be a reckoning about Betty later on. What did Mrs. Muir do?"

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"She went about telling people that poor old Miss Lorrimer was a back number and no longer to be reckoned with as a power for evil. As for Mrs. Seaton, she was the wife of a naval officer, who might one day be an admiral and knighted—who knows? And any way, it *didn't do* to neglect people with possibilities and presentable husbands. Pandora! She was a romantic mystery—said to be the daughter of a Spanish Prince, and at school still, anyway. So, by degrees, by ones and twos, they all called.

"I don't say we were ever frightfully popular." Elizabeth gave an expressive shrug of the shoulders. "Things *always* happen on the wrong days in this house. Misfortunes become habits, not accidents. There was the terrible time Lady Peacock came to lunch, and the meat didn't; and Betty, the little beast, after staring at her for about ten minutes, said, 'Mummy, why's her hair on crooked?'

"Then, Aunt Tabitha will *not* be kept out of the drawing-room, and sometimes she says *the* most appalling things. Other times she sings, which is infinitely worse.

"Then, I only have one servant, Mary. A jewel among women, especially if I have one of my nervous heads. But she *won't* wear a cap. She *will* call me 'Miss Elizabeth,' giving people the idea that I'm not properly married. She insists upon going about the house in sand-shoes. No one else has a maid with such peculiarities.

"Also, it seems, I am not bringing Betty up in the way she should go. Mothers don't care about their darlings associating with her. It is well known that

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she drinks tea instead of milk; takes mustard with beef; doesn't say her prayers, and that once she swallowed a slug at the instigation of the butcher's boy. I am sorry to say he is her greatest friend," added Elizabeth regretfully.

Roger made a movement expressive of annoyance, impatience and disgust, at which she stretched out a restraining hand.

"Never mind, dear," she said soothingly, "you shall draw up a list of reforms for both Betty and me—only *don't* ask me to give up smoking, or to go to church, or to call on people's 'at home' days, or to join the Ladies' Golf Club, or to be a teetotaller, or to chaperon Pandora—anything else you like.

"And that reminds me—Pandora. Of course, she is disapproved of too. She paints pictures, often of nude figures, lives in a flat all by herself, and leans out of the window in a beautiful kimono to talk to Edward, who adores her. So they say she is fast."

"Poor Pandora!"

"Still, in spite of all these drawbacks, people called upon us and put up with our ways till a year ago—till Mrs. Miles came to live at Fairview, in fact."

"Elizabeth, can you mean to tell me——"

"Nothing, my dear Roger, beyond that. Nothing for positive certain.

"Mrs. Miles came, and people began to drop off. Not that I cared. They are a dull lot, most of them, here; taken up with golf and gossip, and so forth. As for me, I am always busy writing, and Pandora's busy painting, and Betty amuses herself, and Tabitha lives in the past.

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"What more do we want, any of us? However, impossible not to notice, and impossible not to object on principle to being snubbed. So, after a bit, I spoke to Mrs. Muir about it. In spite of being a snob, and having two front teeth that wobble when she talks, she is quite a good soul, and to be relied on to speak the truth—particularly when it is disagreeable!"

Privately, Roger thought it a pity that Elizabeth should speak in such a disrespectful way of her mother's old friend. But he forebore comment, and she went on.

"After a bit, she told me that it was her belief that Mrs. Miles was at the bottom of it. The trouble was that there was talk about Pandora."

"About Pandora?"

"Yes—nothing definite. Nothing one could take hold of or have anyone up for libel over—just rumours, insinuations, no more. All as difficult to trace as the source of a mountain burn."

"Then how do you know that Mrs. Miles——"

"Oh, I don't *know*. Have you never heard of intuitions—or putting two and two together and making four? I am *certain* that Mrs. Miles has been saying things about Pandora. And people, willing as usual to believe that there is never smoke without a fire, have been warned off. Mrs. Miles has never returned my call. She met us at one of Mrs. Muir's tiresome dinner parties, and though Pandora was introduced to her, she cut her dead the very next day. From then on, people began to drop us!" Elizabeth pitched her cigarette end in the direction of the fireplace. It fell upon the rug and Roger picked it up and threw it in the grate, then he leaned his back

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against the mantelpiece, regarding his wife with thoughtful eyes.

"I am reluctant to think that Mrs. Miles is that sort of a woman," he said slowly.

"It does seem a pity. I am sorry for these small-minded people myself," agreed Elizabeth cheerfully.

That was not precisely what he had meant, but he did not say so. "I'll take the car back myself this morning," he answered. "There can be no harm in Betty coming along with me for the drive. But, of course, if Mrs. Miles does not call upon you at once, there the matter ends."

"There it probably ends even if she does," retorted Elizabeth. "What can the creature possibly have against my little Pandora?"

Roger shook his head. He looked disturbed and worried, and he forbore to say that Pandora's appearance was probably what was against her. She had the kind of look that is apt to create a prejudice in the feminine mind; a something hard to define but very easy to perceive, that instantly marked her out as different from other girls in St. Brides. A something that very decidedly added to her distinction, if it detracted from her popularity, Roger decided.

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CHAPTER VII

THE next ten days passed and Pandora did not come to The Knowe.

Elizabeth was surprised whenever she had time to think of the girl at all, but her thoughts were full of her novel, and of Roger, who was proving exacting, and of a tiresome bill from Brown's, about which she had forgotten, but which had come in with a demand for payment.

The bill had come in the day before, and after a few minutes' consideration, she had sat down and written a reply that she would send payment on the 15th of June. A reprieve of nearly a month, which had lifted a weight off her mind until the night watches, when she had lain for an hour or more staring out of the open window wondering how and where in all the world she was to get £30 within the next three weeks. A riddle to which Roger presented himself as the only answer.

Yet she shrank from the thought of telling him, and that not only for her own sake, but, far more, because she hated worrying him.

And money matters did worry Roger. He had a horror of debt. The pity was that he was unable to make his wife share the horror with him. Elizabeth had little idea of the value of money; she was wildly

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extravagant with little to show for it, and ran up bills without a thought for the day of reckoning.

It had happened more than once already that Roger had come home to find her accounts in a hopeless state of muddle and arrears. He had straightened things out and paid up, and Elizabeth had been overwhelmed with shame and repentance; she had vowed that never should it happen again; for months she had even paid ready money for everything. But—Elizabeth had the blood of generations of spendthrifts in her veins. By degrees, things had drifted back, and here she was with a bill of £30 that had been allowed to run on and mount, by shillings and pence, for nearly two years.

She was trying, just now, to write a love chapter, and found herself exasperated beyond measure by the intrusion of these matters into her thoughts. She flung down her pen at last and rang up Pandora.

After trying three times and receiving no answer, she was perfectly certain that it was the fault of the girl at the Exchange—so she incautiously lost her temper with the coolly impertinent voice at the other end, which was exasperatingly in the right.

Elizabeth promised to report her, and rang off.

"Roger shall go and bring the child to me," she said. "I will not have her holding off in this silly way just because she has gone and engaged herself to Edward Rattray." And flinging open the door she called Roger.

Roger came in from the garden, where he had been mowing the front lawn.

"I am glad you have called me," he said, "I have been wanting to talk to you——"

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She cut him short with an expressive gesture. "Dear, I only wish I could! The last thing I have time for this morning is talking. If you only knew! I am up to my eyes. Will you go down into St. Brides for me and fetch Pandora back with you? Whether she wants to come or not, bring her. It's imperative. She might as well bring her toothbrush and stop the night."

Roger filled his pipe and nodded silently.

"Oh—and you might look in at Henderson's and bring me some more MS. paper: I never can remember how you buy it. Is it by the quire or by the quart? But never mind, they'll know——"

"Come with me, the walk will do you good." He waited anxiously for her reply. He really wanted her—how much, he scarcely realized till she answered, and he knew that she was not coming.

"Nothing will do me good until Hermione and Ernest are safely married. At present I can scarcely tell whether they ever will be."

He knew by this time that Hermione and Ernest were the two principal characters in Elizabeth's novel. The fact that they usurped nearly all her thoughts and time had made him take a frightful dislike to them. In much the same way, eight years ago, he had taken a dislike to the unknown Pandora, then a child at school, and the object—as he always believed—of Elizabeth's warmest affections. It seemed to Roger that for him there never had been anything but the second place in her heart.

At first, he had been wildly jealous, even when, at the same time, he was filled with a beatified gratitude,

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and scarcely able to believe in the good fortune that had made him Elizabeth's husband. By-and-by he had grown used to being Elizabeth's husband; used to the inconsequences and the gaiety that had charmed him to her; used to her red hair and her changeful, beautiful eyes; used, even, to the knowledge that she had interests enough in her life to make her independent alike of his absence or his presence—yes, even used to that, though he had never become wholly reconciled to it. He wished now, heartily, as he had so often wished before, that Elizabeth had never set her pen to paper in the writing of these stories of hers, since the characters of them were so horribly real to her that they came and went, a shadowy procession, never ending, between him and her.

He said nothing to persuade her to come with him now, only after a minute's silence—"I'll take Betty with me!"

"Do!" she returned cordially, "it will keep her out of mischief. I saw her, this morning, on the verandah roof without a *stitch* on her, 'pretending she was Eve,' she said. Where does she get her ideas from? I can't think. Tell her to wear her boots, for there's a hole in the heel of her stocking. Good-bye, dear! Be back to the next meal!" She dropped a quick, light kiss on to his coat sleeve and went back to the study and shut herself in with Hermione and Ernest.

Aunt Tabitha came tip-toeing down the stairs. She was dressed in a stiff brocade dress and a poke bonnet lined inside with pink fluted silk—relic from God only knew what long-ago days. Against the gay colours her face looked dead and withered, lifeless as that of

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a mummy, save for the eyes which glanced hither and thither with their usual cunning.

She looked at Roger with an arch coquetry that was both horrible and pathetic.

"My dear John!" she said, "I felt a migraine coming on so I have just sent round to the stables for the phæton, feeling confident that you would drive me into Bath."

"Great Heaven!" thought Roger helplessly. "I would love to drive you to Bath, Aunt Tabitha," he said desperately, "but isn't it—er—rather far for the horse?"

"Oh, Daddy!" whispered Betty, who had crept up unnoticed by him, "she is an old, old lady, and her whims must be humoured, else she gets into one of her moods! You leave her to me!"

She went up to the old creature and took her hand with a little coaxing gesture.

"You go into the study and sit quietly along with 'Lizabeth, dear; the pony's gone round to be shod just now, but soon as it's ready, John'll ride into Bath and bring you back some sugar candy. He thinks it's real cold for you to be out, yourself."

Aunt Tabitha gave the whimper of a disappointed child, and turned to the study door. "Quite right, quite right!" she muttered to herself. "The snow is deep—John will catch his death of cold—but he is always careful of me."

She stood for a moment with a finger on her lip in an attitude of seventy years ago, watching the little girl who was pulling on a pair of white cotton gloves.

Betty nodded at her reassuringly.

"I'll go with him and take care of him and see he

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changes his wet feet when he gets back," she said with a little air of importance, "and we'll bring you back the loveliest box of chocolates, with a lady on the lid with gold curls. You run in to 'Lizabeth and wait for us—but go like a mouse, or she'll turn you out!"

Aunt Tabitha gave a shrill giggle of delight, shook her curls at Roger (they were black still, which made her look infinitely more old and weird than if they had been grey), and tripped into the study.

"You see, that's settled her!" said Betty with a sigh of relief, "and now let's be off, Daddy! Have you got some money with you, for she won't forget the chocolates, you know? I daresay you could get a box for a shilling, but I know you get beauties for one-and-six, with enough in them for two persons."

"I think I have plenty," smiled Roger. "Aren't you going to wear a hat?"

"To tell the *truth*, I can't lay my hand on it just at a moment's notice," replied the child with dignity. "I've got some gloves instead. Shall we make a start?"

Roger agreed, and they set off down the hill together. Betty's hat was discovered in the drive, where it had lain over night; it was put on, and the gloves left in the fork of a tree till the return journey.

Pandora's flat was reached by a queer little corkscrew stairway. Her studio was a quaintly shaped apartment at the top of a very old house; one set of windows caught a glimpse of the sea washing the cliffs at the foot of the old churchyard, and looked full on to the ruins of the Cathedral. The others gave on to the street, and when Pandora idled, as often she did, and sat in the broad window-seat looking picturesque

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with purple cushions at her back, she could see, further down the street, Queen Mary's House, and, not infrequently, Edward himself—for he had a habit, when he was at home, of leaning out of the window of his smoking room and looking in the direction of Pandora's rooms.

Pandora was not at the window on this occasion, and Betty led the way up the winding stairs with an air of importance which her father found most entertaining. On reaching the door she knocked softly. And, as there was no reply, opened it and went in.

Pandora was standing in the middle of the floor beside a large easel.

Before he was aware of it, Roger had stopped, and was staring at her, taken aback, struck anew with her beauty and by the spell of her fascination as indefinable as the essence of beauty itself. She wore a Spanish dress, very likely the one in which she had been photographed, cut very low, daring in colour—black, red and yellow were all combined in it—the conventional dress of Carmen. She had a red rose between her teeth.

Over the head of Betty, who rushed to greet her, her dark eyes flashed a look at Roger—questioning, pleading, challenging. Then she smiled a delicious, disarming smile that turned her into a little girl again.

"I'm dressed up!" she told him. "Have you ever seen Zélie de Lussan as Carmen? I am trying to paint her from memory. It helps if I dress up and look the part myself."

"Why—it's awfully like, dear!" said Betty in tones of admiration.

"Silly. You've never seen De Lussan."

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"But it's like you, Dora!"

"May I look?" asked Roger. "Not that my opinion is worth much, for I don't know a thing about pictures."

"Yes—do!" said Pandora cordially. She loved showing her work, and praise or blame—no matter from whom—had the power to depress or elate her.

Roger did not blame. He stood looking in silence upon the canvas from which the painted face of a woman, who bore a strong likeness to Pandora, and yet was not Pandora, looked forth. It was not De Lussan either.

"Well?" said Pandora, with a little sigh, "you don't say anything. You think, like Edward, that it is bad?"

"That I certainly don't! I should like to say that I think it is very good, only criticism of any kind from me, when I know nothing at all about it, seems impertinence. Why did Rattray think it bad?"

"Oh, don't ask me! Besides, he didn't say *bad*, exactly. In fact, he didn't say anything at all. He simply smiled. It's a way he has when a thing doesn't seem to him to be worth arguing about. That smile of his reduced my picture to the level of an illustration in a penny paper!"

"That's nonsense!" said Roger. "Whether it is good or bad I can't tell. But it is certainly original and daring. No British matron would dream of buying it."

"Ah, well! I don't paint for British matrons!" said Pandora, with a sigh of satisfaction, "and I would rather hear that my work was original and daring, any day, than that it was good. I shall tell Edward what

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you say. He would sooner cut out his tongue than praise anything I had done," she added vexedly.

She put down her paint brush and went to the window and looked out. The sun was shining, a little breeze stirred the leaves of the trees. She looked, as she felt, absurdly happy.

"There he is!" she exclaimed suddenly—"Edward, I mean!" And she leaned out of the window and waved her hand to him.

Roger watched her from the back of the room, meditatively and rather sombrely.

"No, don't trouble to come up!" Pandora was calling. "Captain Seaton is here, and Betty. I am just going out with them—— For you have come to take me back with you, haven't you?" she asked, turning into the room again to speak to Roger.

"As a matter of fact—yes—Elizabeth wants you."

"I am going back to The Knowe with them just as soon as I have got back into my everyday clothes again! I am still Carmen, you see! And do you know that Captain Seaton has been saying such nice things about my Zélie? He doesn't think it so very hopelessly bad as you do. And he has seen heaps and heaps! He has travelled all over the world and seen all the best pictures. He has been to the Prado, and——"

"Pandora!——"

She made a gesture to silence Roger, and laughed down at Edward, who stood beneath looking up at her. His answer was inaudible to Captain Seaton, who scarcely knew whether to be amused or angry.

"I have never been inside the Prado in my life!" he said.

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"But I never said your picture was bad at all," Edward was protesting. "I said—Why call it 'De Lussan as Carmen,' when it was a great deal more like yourself?"

"You said you didn't care about the blue background."

"Well, I don't care about it! It reminds me of too much Dulac. May I come up and see you this afternoon?"

"Do! But I shan't be here."

"Then where will you be?"

"Can't say. Depends on Elizabeth!" She laughed down at him, the red rose between her teeth.

From where Roger was standing he could see her profile as pure and clear as a little cameo. He wished that he could see her eyes too. He wondered if Edward minded her teasing. Apparently not, for he, too, was laughing.

"Well, when may I come?" he persisted.

"I leave it to you to decide! Here! Catch!" She opened wide her mouth and the rose fell.

Edward caught it and drew it through his buttonhole. "Good-bye!" he said, and strolled off in a leisurely way.

"Does he ever do any work?" Roger asked, feeling, for no reason worth mentioning, very much annoyed with Edward Rattray and his debonair manner and gay smile.

"I think perhaps he does a little sometimes," returned Pandora casually. "He is a doctor, though I never heard that he had any patients to speak of except Elizabeth and an old lady who lives at Cupar and

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gives him honey when he goes to see her. He has private means, you know, has Edward, and his house belongs to him. It is a lovely house," she added thoughtfully—"every girl in St. Brides covets it!"

She smiled at his solemn face and wanted to cry out, "Why do you disapprove of me so?" but she did not, though his gravity urged her to say further wild things if only to make him disapprove the more.

"It's lovely to feel you are marrying a man all the other girls are wanting to marry!" she told him. "There are one or two in St. Brides just now who hate me even more than usual—and that's saying quite a lot!"

Of course he saw perfectly well that she was trying to provoke him, though for the life of him he could not understand the reason for it. Beautiful she was, and more graceful than any woman he had ever known, but he did not like her, or trust her. He told himself that he did not like her one little bit. It annoyed him to see how Betty hung with adoration in her eyes on her every word and movement. He did not want his daughter to grow up like Pandora. Her very attitude of careless assurance in her low-cut dancing dress filled him with disgust. She was moving about the room putting away her painting things apparently unconscious of his watching, brooding eyes, when, all at once, she flashed him a smile.

A mad, fierce desire shook him almost beyond control of himself just to seize her in his arms and kiss her, and kiss her, and kiss her till she had to own he was her master, and be done with it—till these beautiful eyes lost their look of insolent daring, till her

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lips had ceased to smile, and her cheeks were white. Just for one moment he was giddy with the desire of it. Then the madness passed, and he sprang up, his own face rather white and his voice not quite steady.

"Hadn't we better be getting back to Elizabeth?" he said; "and, by the way, she wants you to stay the night——"

"Oh! say you will, dear!" entreated Betty. "Give your consent, darling, and we'll sleep together and lie awake and talk!"

"Well, pack my bag, Honey, and I'll think about it! The things are all in my room. Don't forget the tooth-brush. Shut the door after you."

Betty rushed off in an ecstasy of joy and importance, and when she had gone Pandora turned to Roger.

"Shall I come, or shall I not?" she asked, going close up to him and putting her question seriously with a look of wounded pride in her face that made him feel a brute. Still he moved away from her.

"Come, of course," he said, giving her back look for look, as if in the endeavour to read the purpose of her soul. "But we must come to an understanding, you and I—I think you must see that."

She turned with the ghost of a smile and a gesture that rid her of all responsibility.

"Then I'll come!" she said, "and you shall have your explanation, if that's what you want; but I think explanations are a bore and a confession of weakness. What I do, I do, and there's an end of it!"

"There's never an end of it," returned Roger, in a disturbed voice, "but I'm afraid that's one of the lessons

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that it takes a lifetime to learn, and longer still to profit by."

Pandora only laughed. "You are far too serious!" she said. "Look at the sun! People ought only to be grave on a dull day, and Heaven knows that's opportunity enough! Now I'll change my dress, and whilst I am about it, would you mind looking into the kitchen—it's that cupboard place at the end of the passage—and if you see an extraordinary looking creature who ought to be in an orphanage for decayed imbeciles sitting reading the *Weekly Scotsman*, or breaking the last of the tea-cups, just tell her that I shan't want her to warm up what she left of yesterday's dinner, and that she may go home to her grandmother and stay there till to-morrow. Her name is Marianna," she added for his further enlightenment as she went out of the room.

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CHAPTER VIII

THEY walked back to The Knowe through the sunshiny morning. A light breeze blew off the sea, and the sky was a deep blue; the gorse was still in blossom on the cliffs, and the sweet, almond scent of it filled the air. In the beechwoods over beyond the meadow a cuckoo was calling and calling.

Betty, clasping a box of chocolates, the size of which filled her soul with satisfaction, walked with a grave air of independence between her Father and Pandora. She chose to walk thus instead of hurrying on, or lagging behind, because she loved to hear the strange and often inexplicable conversations that passed between grown-ups, particularly if one of the grown-ups should chance to be a man. It was therefore a disappointment to her now that Daddy and Dora scarcely talked at all. She might almost have thought that they had quarrelled, only Dora's face, serene and smiling, reassured her.

Elizabeth was in the garden. She had not been able to bring about an engagement between Ernest and Hermione, and she was watering a bed of pansy seedlings with a worried frown on her brow.

Aunt Tabitha was wandering about the lawn, in and out of the rose bushes, with mincing, tripping footsteps, holding a conversation with an invisible companion as

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she went. She still wore the pink lined bonnet and the old brocade.

Elizabeth and Pandora greeted each other without a cloud between. Elizabeth put her arm round Dora's shoulders, and the watering can dribbled impartially over their linen skirts as they walked away together.

"It is ages since I've seen you," reproached Elizabeth. "And you know how horribly unfinished the days seem when you don't look in, and now, to crown all——" She paused and looked back. Roger and Betty, talking to Aunt Tabitha, were out of earshot. "Yesterday morning comes this!" and she took from her sleeve Brown's bill and thrust it into Pandora's hand. "Look at it," she said, "but don't let anyone see. What's to be done? I'm nearly frantic!"

"I don't wonder," murmured Dora sympathetically, as she ran her eye down the long blue sheet, at the foot of which was affixed an ominous note to the effect that "payment was requested by return of post."

"They might just as well request the crown jewels, or the sun, moon, and stars while they are about it," said Elizabeth in a worried voice. "Why are they so unreasonable, these people? They let a bill mount up for two years without a murmur, then all at once, when you are least prepared for it, they turn round and pounce on you. Oh, why do these things happen just when I am busiest?"

Pandora did not know. "These things," in a greater or lesser degree, were always happening, whether Elizabeth was busy or not. She was as incapable of keeping out of debt as a duck out of water. Yet they lived inexpensively; Roger made her as good an allowance

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as he was able to afford, and paid the rent of The Knowe, which belonged to Aunt Tabitha. One day it would doubtless belong to Elizabeth, and then, Pandora reflected, they would be better off. In the meantime, very likely, her friend gave largely to charities or threw an occasional five-pound note into the waste-paper basket in mistake for a bill. It would be just like her.

"Did you really get six pairs of silk stockings in December?" she asked.

"How can I tell now, in May, what I bought in December? If I did they are worn out long ago and hopelessly bad, so they ought not to be paid for at all. There is six yards of elastic down. I didn't get that; I never do get elastic; why should I?"

"Then here is your shot green and gold evening dress, Elizabeth. It cost £17 17s."

"I know. And, if you remember, I have only worn it twice, when any old thing would have done just as well. Occasions like this make me wish myself dead. Really, Pandora, what the deuce am I to do? Bar telling Roger, what is left?"

"What about Aunt Tabitha?" suggested Pandora. Elizabeth shook her head.

"I can't take Aunt Tabitha's money. I should feel a thief. She'd hand it over as a child hands over a lapful of daisies and know no better. If only my story was finished and paid for! It is next to impossible to work now Roger has come home—not that he interrupts so very much, but he is on my mind. Meals have to be ordered and eaten punctually, and you know we are used to rubbing along just anyhow here at The Knowe.

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Most men wouldn't put up with me at all!" Elizabeth looked regretful, and doubtful, and a little sad. Then she sighed and cheered up. "The truth is, I ought never to have married!" she said. "I am not fit; I am not good enough. Wives are born, Pandora, not made —that's my impression. They are like poets and cooks and suchlike. Are you making my mistake? For you are like me, in most things; or is it that I have brought you up all wrong? Perhaps you take your colour from me, and when you are married to Edward you will prove to be quite a different Pandora, domesticated and settled. What do you think?"

But Pandora only laughed and shook her head, and declined to say, and they walked on down the lawn, between the rosebushes in silence. Elizabeth looked troubled; Pandora thoughtful.

"Elizabeth," she said at last; "you say you ought never to have married Roger. Does that mean that you don't love him?"

"Don't love him? Of course I love him! Love has nothing whatever to do with it. Besides I never said I ought not to have married Roger. I said I ought not to have married at all. Quite a different matter. I am not good enough for anything but writing silly stories, and one day I shall wake up and find I have written my last line—I *know*. Then, Dora, what shall I do?"

But Pandora only laughed once more at her anxious face. "When that happens, you can take up being a good wife!" she said. "And now, listen! Shall I lend you the money? I have got £200 a year. Surely it can be managed out of that?"

"I don't think so, Honey; but you are the dearest

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thing to offer. Why, £200 won't do more than get your trousseau, and, probably, you are in debt too."

"Probably. Shall I consult Edward?"

"No. That won't do either. He would offer to lend it, and I have never taken money from a man yet. The best of them think they have a right to something in exchange, if it's only an invitation to dinner. No, Pandora, I must tell Roger; and I confess the idea depresses me. He is never in debt himself, and he has a horror of it—derived from his father, who *hadn't*, and who died and left behind him bills for all the rest to pay. Isn't that a poem, Honey?"

"It sounds like a parody on the 'Psalm of Life.' I don't think Roger would be hard on you, Elizabeth, if you did confess to him——"

"Oh, no, he'd not be hard," sighed Elizabeth. "He would be forgiving, which is infinitely worse; and I have had to do it so often before—nearly every time he has come home, in fact; and I can't help feeling he must be getting tired of the same old story, and yet I don't feel able to invent a new one. It's these sort of worries that age one. If there were no money in the world, Dora, I can't help thinking we should all have eternal youth!"

And poor Elizabeth wrung her hands in her distress.

Pandora made no answer, for she was lost in thought. They paced the lawn for a few minutes in silence before she spoke, then:

"I've got an idea," she said. "You know that horrid-looking little lawyer person, Fanshawe?—the man I always say is so like a fox."

Elizabeth nodded. "But, Honey——"

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"Well, he buys pictures. Edward knows him. He is by way of being a bit of an artist himself. Anyway, Edward once told me that he has some very fine pictures in his house."

"I don't like Mr. Fanshawe," objected Elizabeth. "Oh, I admit I don't know him," she added; "but then, think of his eyes: they are enough to damn him anywhere with their slyness. His hands are detestable, too."

Pandora brushed aside these objections. "My dear, what do his hands or his eyes matter? It's his money we want. What's more, I mean to get it. The other day, when Edward was in looking at my sketches, he picked up the head of a boy in charcoal and said: 'That's the sort of thing Fanshawe hangs in his study. He goes in for austerity, though you might not think it.'"

"I don't much believe in the austerity of a man who contrives to look exactly like a middle-aged Mephistopheles," said Elizabeth; "but were he 'pure as ice and chaste as snow' I should yet hate you to have any dealings with him, dear, if that's what you are driving at."

"But, in all the world, *why?* He is rich and a bachelor. He has nothing on earth to spend his money on but hobbies. And the chiefest of these is pictures. Now, I paint quite good pictures, Elizabeth. At least, I think I do—I believe and hope I do——"

"Yes, you do—indeed you do, darling," Elizabeth hastened to assure her.

"And what was the use of me having an expensive art education if I am not to turn it to account in the hour of need?" pursued Pandora. "I have always meant to sell my pictures. Indeed, I have sold two already."

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"Yes, dear, to Edward," Elizabeth reminded her.

"Well—a beginning; and, let me tell you, Edward is most horribly critical. It was not for a keepsake that he bought my pictures; and if he can put up with them, surely Mr. Fanshawe can. He is going to be given the chance, anyway, and if he buys something you shall have the money. Of course you need not take it unless you like!"

"Oh, what a relief it would be!" sighed Elizabeth. She gave her shoulders a shake as though ridding them of a burden, and breathed deeply of the fresh, summer air. "After all, there's a month before I need pay up!" she said. "The skies may fall before then, or Brown's be burnt down by suffragettes—lots of things may happen before the 15th of June, Dora——"

"But nothing will happen to prevent you paying your bill, so I shall set about getting to know Mr. Fanshawe," said Pandora practically. "I shall speak to Edward about him at once. What if he hates my pictures and won't have one at any price?" she added anxiously. At the mere thought of her pictures failing to meet with admiration she looked despondent and gloomy. It was Elizabeth who cast trouble aside.

"Oh, but he'll like them awfully. How can he do anything else?" she said comfortingly. "Besides, I always believe in the best happening—especially in summer, somehow, and on a day like this. Though, of course, I daresay that's unreasonable. Have you ever noticed, Pandora, that if you meet trouble half-way, very often it is not there to be met? I often think it prevents disasters happening if you dread them very much——"

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"I had not noticed particularly. We dread people coming to call, and they seldom do come—if that has anything to do with it——"

Elizabeth laughed. "And talking of calling," she said, "reminds me—that horrid Mrs. Miles at Fairview used to know Roger at Gib., and seemingly thinks it's worth while cultivating me for his sake. She is coming to call at last. So she told him. Personally, I have no wish to know the woman. I dislike her."

"She dyes her hair," remarked Pandora in an impartial manner.

"Oh, I don't think so, dear! She would have chosen a better shade . . . but I am sorry she is calling. I have a marked antipathy to her. Don't you think she has furtive eyes?"

"I have never noticed them. She simply doesn't interest me. She won't call upon me, I hope."

At this moment the staircase window was thrown open, and the expressionless face of Mary looked out. "Your lunch is ready, Miss Elizabeth!" she announced, and withdrew her head and shut the window with a clap—like a cuckoo returning into its clock after announcing the hour.

In the afternoon, Edward turned up and stayed to tea, devoting himself principally to Elizabeth, who was very gay.

They sat out on the lawn, and Pandora, grave and silent, gazed most of the time through the apple boughs up at the blue sky beyond.

Roger watched her, and marvelled at the Madonna-like expression which she wore, and thought cynical thoughts about her that reassured him greatly about

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himself. She was obviously the sort of girl for whose sake men made fools of themselves, and for a few minutes that morning he had almost feared—— Absurd, of course! And he decided that, given the chance, he would have his explanation with her to-night.

The difficulty to that, of course, was that Elizabeth had already asked Edward to stay to supper, and he had accepted, and although in the meantime he talked with Elizabeth and laughed and joked, he had the air of a man who bided his time. Roger could not doubt but that he, too, intended to talk with Pandora that night.

Fortune, contrary to her custom, favoured them both.

At seven o'clock the figure of Mary stumped out of the house and across the lawn bearing upon a tea-plate a folded sheet of paper, which she presented to Edward.

"There's a boy rode up on his bicycle, Doctor, with this slip to say, Would you go over at once to see Mistress Wilson at Cupar, who's took bad and may not live to see the morning."

"And how do you know that 'the slip,' as you call it, says all that, Mary?" asked Edward. He took the sheet of notepaper from her as he spoke and read it, a slight frown on his face.

"The boy must have took the liberty of reading it, sir, I suppose, for he told me," replied Mary, in no wise abashed. "Will I tell him you're going?"

"I should think you very probably will, Mary!" He got up as he spoke. "I wish I hadn't chosen to be a doctor," he grumbled.

"Oh, but *must* you go?" asked Elizabeth. "Couldn't

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you have dinner first? Somehow I feel certain that she is not as bad as she thinks she is."

"I feel confident of it too. However, I must go. Pandora, come with me—we'll run along in the car in no time."

Pandora removed her gaze from the sky and the apple boughs, and gave him a long, slow look. "How can I come with you? You know I hate ill people and sick-rooms, and the smell of medicine; and you have only got your bicycle with you anyway. No, I'll walk to the top of the hill with you, 'cos I want to ask a favour of you, but that's all."

Elizabeth shot a grateful look at her, and she and Edward walked away together.

"Well—what's the favour?" he asked as soon as they were out of earshot. "I wonder if you know, Pandora, how ripping you are looking to-day!"

Pandora smiled faintly. "I hate the word 'ripping,'" she said. "*All* the Mackenzies use it, in a body, *and* Kate Wilbur——"

"Lovely, then. Do you like that better?"

She took the precaution of moving a little bit away from him, to the side of the road, where she picked a spray of budding hawthorn from the hedge. "I am glad you think me fairly nice looking," she said sweetly. "I'd hate to be plain."

He gave a little laugh. "And sometimes I almost wish you were!" he said. "I'd be happier, for I should not love you so much."

"Then it is for my looks you love me?" said Pandora, rather piqued.

"Well—and isn't it for *something* that every woman

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is loved. Why not for your looks as soon as for anything else? Did you think it was for your beautiful soul, Honey?"

"Honey is Elizabeth's name for me; I don't want anyone else to use it."

"She is welcome to it. It doesn't suit you. Honey is over sweet, and you are certainly not. . . . That hawthorn you are holding to your face—it is no whiter than your skin—scarcely as white. This isn't one of the days that I wish you were plain, though I am sick with loving you, Pandora. Do you know that you make me think of sunsets, and all sorts of beautiful unhappy things, and poetry—not Kipling's, but the kind you can't understand. What are you thinking of with your black, black eyes, staring straight before you?"

"I was wondering why you did not say all these wonderful things to me three years ago when I, too, was sick with loving," replied Pandora, who, as a matter of fact, was wishing that it was Roger uttering these impassioned words to her, and not Edward at all.

He gave a gesture of despair. "I don't suppose I could make you understand," he said. "I don't suppose any woman understands how pretty nearly every man must wish he had a few years of his life to live over again when once he meets the woman he loves."

"Do you wish that, poor Edward?"

"Yes—when you say things like you did a minute ago—loving me three years ago." His voice grew hoarse, and he turned his eyes away from her. "I feel absolutely mad, and all the time I—I——"

"Yes—you were loving Kate Wilbur then, or somebody else."

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"Oh, stop it!" he cried fiercely, and before she could prevent him he had caught her in his arms. For one moment his blue eyes flamed at her. "I never loved her," he said. "I have only loved one girl, Pandora—you. Never another! There never will be another, and you know it. Oh, I love you—love you!" he whispered, his face pressed against her white face. She did not stir, and it filled him with a savage joy to feel her slight, still body in his arms. "Kiss me before I go," he entreated—"you have never kissed me yet!"

He raised her hands to his cheeks. "Such cool, sweet hands, like the hawthorn you picked a minute ago!"

It was crushed and broken in the dust beneath their feet now, but neither of them noticed it.

"Your lips are cool, too—won't you kiss me, Pandora?" the stammering, pleading voice went on assailing her ears with entreaties and protestations till, with a little sigh of unwilling surrender, she turned her face to him and gave him what he so greatly desired.

It satisfied him just as much as a spoonful of water satisfies a thirsty man. But he let her go, and they walked on to the top of the hill in silence. He was white, and his hands were trembling; he was oblivious to everything but her presence.

She was wondering how she could approach the subject of Fanshawe. "You have forgotten your bicycle," she said abruptly.

He started as if she had wakened him from a dream. "Have I? What does it matter? I am going home, and can get the car. I shall drive back from Mrs. Wilson's past The Knowe to-night, Pandora. Will you think of me?"

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"Very likely I shall."

"I hate the nights when you stay at The Knowe instead of at your own flat. I like to feel that you are near me, just opposite—though that's not enough for me now, any longer. I want the time to come when you'll be with me altogether. When at nights the width of the street won't lie between us, Pandora."

Pandora stopped. At all costs this sort of talk must stop. She had come quite as far as she had meant to, and she had not even begun to broach the subject of Fanshawe. The time for broaching it gently was passed; she must plunge into it now or never.

"Edward," she began firmly, "if you remember I came with you to ask a favour of you——"

"Pandora, when will that time come? Give me something to think of on my way to that old woman to-night!"

"I have already given you something——"

"Enough to make me want ten thousand times more. I can't help it if I am a selfish brute——"

"Oh, you are not that; you are rather a dear if you are a goose. There! there! What a boy it is! I'll marry you in the Autumn—I shouldn't wonder! But before we fix any more about that, I want you to bring that man Fanshawe to my flat to see my pictures——"

"Fanshawe! That chap! But why?" His face had changed. It expressed not only amazement, but also a disposition to refuse her request. "Why?" he repeated blankly.

"Just 'cos I want to sell them."

"But—to Fanshawe, of all people? He's a—well, I suppose he ought not to be an outsider by rights, but

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he behaves like one. At any rate, he is a poisonous person."

Pandora felt unable to give the real reason why Fanshawe of all people should be expected to buy her pictures. It was one that would certainly not appeal to Edward. She had never spoken to the man in her life, but she knew by sure instinct that he admired her. She felt certain that if she were to ask him to buy one of her pictures he would do so. Personally, she disliked the look of him intensely. He was withered, dry, cynical, and *at least* sixty. A person in whom she could not be expected to take the slightest interest. But—his money was worth as much as another man's, and would probably be a good deal easier to get at, since she knew of no other person in St. Brides who would be at all likely to want to buy her works of art. Of course, there was Edward—but, somehow, she was not going to ask Edward. Not only had Elizabeth been against the idea of getting money from him, but she—Pandora—felt a desire to try her luck with some outsider as far as her art was concerned.

Edward meanwhile had lighted a pipe and regained his ordinary self-possession. He looked at Pandora, his blue eyes smiling and amused. "I wonder why on earth you should want such a little blighter to buy your pictures?" he said.

"I want him to have the chance of buying them." Pandora really made an effort to control her temper, for it was a maxim of Elizabeth's that nothing worth the winning was ever gained by anger.

"Are you short of money?"

"That's not the point."

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"It's the whole thing in a nutshell. Pandora, if you are hard up, the sooner you——"

She stood still. "Edward, I don't know whether I am hard up or not; I don't care. It is a matter of indifference to me. Stop annoying me with silly suggestions. Will you, or won't you, bring Fanshawe to see my pictures?"

"I was only going to suggest that you let me look into your affairs for you and help you put them straight. Did you think I was asking you to marry me to-morrow?"

If his voice was not perfectly steady she did not notice it.

"Edward—will you, or won't you?" She put on the most beguiling voice she knew, and slipped her hand through his arm. "Aren't you going to answer me before I turn?"

"Well, then—I won't! I know the man and you don't, and never shall if I can help it. He is an odious beast, and not fit to put his foot inside your flat—or the flat of any other lady——"

"Oh, my *dear* boy! Isn't that rather ridiculous? We could have Elizabeth to chaperon us if you like. What do you think he would do, anyway?"

"Possibly he'd get you talked about, and that's quite enough. You are going to be my wife, Pandora, and I am not going to have Fanshawe anywhere near you."

Pandora only laughed. Without exactly intending it, she had succeeded in making him very angry. The fact was she did not love him, and he knew it. He wanted her desperately, with all his being; but the sense

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of joyous elation with which her promise had at first filled him had passed, leaving him restless and depressed, craving for what he could never have, for what she could never give him.

"I am not your wife yet, at any rate," she retorted lightly; "and if you are going to be so tiresome and conventional, I really don't think——"

But he broke her short and caught her in his arms again, with a laugh that was not very mirthful.

"Too late!" he cried. "I'll not let you go now—never! never!" And he kissed her closed eyes and her quiet mouth again and again. "There!" he whispered at last, breathless but triumphant; "you can go home and think of that all night, as I shall do! I love you—but it's not my rôle in life to play mouse to your cat, little Pandora!"

Without another word he turned away and left her.

Pandora, surprised out of her usual calm, sat down on the bank at the side of the road, and thought about him steadily for fully half an hour. She might have gone on thinking indefinitely, and to the advantage of Edward, if Roger had not strolled up and put all thought of him out of her head.

There was not the slightest doubt that he had come on purpose to look for her, and she watched his approach with a little smile that was gratified and glad and anxious all at once.

Here was another man to play with—but this was a much more serious matter than playing with Edward. For instance, if he chose just to hint to Elizabeth—— The mere thought of such a thing made her turn cold,

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for Elizabeth was the one person on earth whose good opinion Pandora really valued. So she watched his approach uneasily, and decided to leave it to him to make the first advances.

He came along slowly and stood before her—a square, strong figure in grey, neither tall nor short; plain, rather than handsome—not to be compared, as she confessed to herself, as far as appearance went, with Edward—not to be compared with him in personal charm or attractiveness either. And yet—there was something about him that had drawn her to him three years ago, and never let her quite forget him; something in his being, orderly, strong, and quiet, that had ascendancy over hers—lawless, wayward, and selfish as it was.

"I daresay you knew I should come," he said, when he stood before her.

It was not quite what he had meant to say, but her smile and the look in her eyes confused his mental image of her. He had expected her to look guilty, somehow, for he felt pretty certain that she had been trying to avoid an explanation with him all these days.

Anything further removed from guilt or confusion than the expression upon the face of Miss Pandora as she smiled up at him, it would have been hard to imagine.

"No, I didn't know," she said. "In fact, I wasn't thinking of you at all. I was thinking of Edward."

"Oh! Have you made up your mind yet whether you are engaged to him or not?"

"I believe I am. He says I am. I am wearing his ring, anyway." And she held up her left hand to

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show him a thin gold band in which was set a single emerald.

"It belonged to his mother," she told Roger. "I don't really care about wearing rings that belonged to people's mothers. It gives me the feeling of having an impossibly good example to live up to."

"I think to have a good example before us is what most of us badly need."

"I knew you would say that! You think nothing of me, I can see that. But I am not really bad—only high-spirited."

Her voice, and above all her face, regretful and gentle, touched him, and he sat down beside her on the bank. "I have never thought you bad," he assured her (though, as a matter of fact, he had debated that point with himself many times since he had come to The Knowe, and before then, too). "At worst, I have only thought you foolish, and, as you say, high-spirited."

"Oh!" she broke in. "Have you thought of me, then? I have of you—often—often, but never guessed who you were! I never wanted to guess. Looking back on that day and night has always been like a dream. The sort that you don't expect to come true, that you hardly want to come true because it is too beautiful. It would be too much happiness—— One thing I know: I shall never have anything in my life like it again. That was my romance."

"Pandora—Hush!"

"But it is true. And if you were not married you would not be telling me now not to say it. Why did you leave me when you did? So suddenly—without a word. And I was so happy."

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He did not speak.

"All the next day I waited for you, and at night. You had said you would come, and that we should be together again—and I wanted you so. Why didn't you come?"

He looked at her. "I thought better of it." Their eyes met; hers did not fall.

"And I am glad I did," he added, after a breathless pause.

"Why?" she whispered insistently. "*Why?*"

"Partly for your own sake, and partly because of Elizabeth."

"Elizabeth! I had forgotten altogether about Elizabeth! And all these three years I haven't known who you were, and so I have been sorry you didn't come back. Sorry! Sorry! Sorry!

"I am still sorry in spite of Elizabeth! After all, it would have done her no harm—she never would have known!" She looked at him, half defiantly, half pleadingly.

He gave a short laugh. How much of life did she understand, and how much did she not? From her face, quite impossible to say.

Suddenly she caught hold of his hand—such a little, soft hand hers was, yet it clung to his with so nervous a strength that he found it difficult to disengage his own from its clasp.

"Don't tell Elizabeth!" she entreated earnestly. "You must never breathe a word to her. You see, she doesn't know that I went to Spain at all. I never told her that, for I was supposed to be studying art in Paris at the time, and she had really not wanted me to leave

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home at all. It was dull for her, sometimes, with both you and me away. Even Elizabeth, you know, has her moments when her work isn't all the world to her—or did you sometimes think her scarcely human?"

"No, I assure you, I think Elizabeth quite as human as most——"

"Why do you look at me when I speak of her as if I were not fit to utter her name?" She looked at him curiously, rather than resentfully.

"Perhaps I think you are not. In fact, we are neither of us fit to sit here talking of her at all. Can't you understand that it is not you I am angry with, but myself, for the part I played that night?"

She gave a little sad laugh. "But need you reproach yourself so very much after all? You went away from me without a word, never to return—though you had promised me you would come back!"

"Promised I would! Yes—exactly. And just on account of that promise I went away next morning by the very first train I could possibly catch—anything to put a distance between yourself and me, and make it impossible for me to keep that promise. I went back to Gib., for I was waiting to rejoin my ship there after a month's sick leave. I had been pretty bad, I remember, with fever, and, though I had been home for three weeks, I hadn't quite shaken it off, I suppose, for all through the night that followed I lay awake—a hot, still night it was, too, like the one that had gone before it. There was a moon, clear and cold and white, that shone right into the room . . . and sometimes I thought you were standing there, back amongst the shadows, watching me. I started up once, thinking I heard your

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voice; but it was a dream. And then I lay and thought of your face, and I wondered if you were thinking of me and wishing I had come to you. And I wished—I wished to God that I had not left you. *Now* do you understand why I have been hating myself and blaming myself, and you too, ever since the other night when I met you here in Elizabeth's house?"

She understood perfectly.

She sat very still, not looking at him, because she could not meet his searching gaze.

Her face was as white now as it had seemed to him that night in the moonlight of Spain—her hair as black as the shadows cast by the white walls on the white, still road.

"So that was why you didn't come?" she whispered.

"That was why. It was Elizabeth I loved, not you, you see."

"Of course." Her voice was very small, and humble, and disarming.

"Tell me all about it," he said more gently—"then we'll put it from us and forget it, and never think of it again!"

She smiled. How absurd that was! Just as if one could forget such things and be as if they had never been. One would not want to. There were not so many things in life that touched the hidden springs of romance. Of course, he knew that too.

"There is not much to tell," she began obediently. "In a way, it was your fault, really, that I was in Spain at all——"

"My fault! Why, I had never even seen you!"

"Of course not! But you rather disliked me.

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Elizabeth knew, and I knew, that it bored you to think of me being there when you were home on leave. You were jealous of me, in fact. Now, weren't you?"

She smiled at him, and he smiled back, rather unwillingly.

"I liked to have Elizabeth to myself, I admit. You see it is not as if I ever saw much of her at any time."

"Well, this time I had been in Paris six months, and I was just going to pack up to go home for the holidays when she wrote to say that you were coming too, for three weeks. She said you were ill, and though she did not ask me not to come, I knew I had better not. So I stayed on in Paris and got dead sick of everything, and I just hated you, and I could not work. And at last I thought—'Well, nobody loves poor Pandora, and even Elizabeth is perfectly happy without me (I found out afterwards she wasn't), and I am the loneliest person in all the world, and so I'll go to Spain!'"

"Why to Spain for consolation?"

"Isn't Spain the Country of Romance—ten thousand times more mysterious, more untrodden, more wonderful even than Italy? To me it is, at all events. Besides, I always feel that it is really and truly my native land. Surely you know that I am at least half, and probably wholly, Spanish myself?"

"I have heard it."

"Well, it is true. If no one had ever told me, still I should know it was true. All my life I have wanted to go to Spain—not only for the pictures in the Prado, though, of course, being an artist they attract me too. Some instinct has always urged me to go, and I determined I would now, when at last I had the chance.

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Somehow, I had the vague idea that I might even find out something about myself—solve the mystery of my birth!" she added with a faint smile. She paused, hoping, perhaps, that he would say something, but he did not, and she went on:

"I went to Madrid, and was disappointed. It had nothing to say to me, nor I to it. Toledo was better. Then I went to Seville——"

She paused once more, and leaning towards him held out the opal that hung round her neck on its thin silver chain.

"Do you remember this?" she asked. "You noticed it, that night, and read the inscription on it: 'To-day is yours. To-morrow belongs to God.' When you read it you said it had been written specially for us—for that night."

Roger felt very acutely the unfairness of confronting him with foolish words uttered years ago under the influence of romantic surroundings and the moonlight shining on a lovely face. Words, moreover, which he had forgotten long since.

Beneath the inscription his eyes fell upon "Seville," and he asked her if she had bought the stone there and at that time.

Pandora shook her head. "I did not buy it at all," she said. "It is the clue to my birth. I believe I was born in Seville, and perhaps that is why I adore it. But I don't want to talk about that now. I only stayed there a week, and though I found out nothing, I was perfectly happy. Then I went to Baya——" Her voice dropped, and she was silent.

He did not speak. It was there that he had met her

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on a day three years ago. A trivial affair of no importance it had seemed to him in the beginning, promising a few hours amusement in the little, walled-in Moorish town, and that was all. But, of course, it had not stopped at that, for they were strangers whom Fate had thrown together in a strange land, and perhaps the novelty of it all had gone to his head, as it certainly had to hers. The day's amusement prolonged itself into a night of enchantment made fragrant by the scent of many roses, bathed in the intense white light of the southern moon; in the olive-grove outside the town there had been a nightingale.

Before either of them had even been aware of the danger of it, passion flamed between them, and the friendship of a day went like a straw in its flames, and with it went all thought of honour and regret.

He had put the episode from his mind long ago, and nearly had succeeded in forgetting it when, now, all unexpectedly, her presence brought back the scene so vividly to his memory that it might have happened yesterday. He could still hear the rush of the mountain torrent far below in the ravine, still see the cold radiance of the moon upon her face. The beauty of her face in the moonlight had shaken him to the soul, stirred all that was romantic and passionate in him. . . .

But he had wakened next day to sanity and to the memory of Elizabeth believing in him at home, and he had left Pandora and gone back to Gibraltar to await his ship, detained by some accident at Port Said. . . .

It had been hard, of course, still he had done it, and had not let himself dwell upon the pain it must have

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cost her. It struck him now, for the first time, and with a sense of remorse that the incident from which he had escaped so easily had left its faint, indefinable mark upon her. Whether he had meant it or not, he had opened her eyes to the knowledge of good and evil.

And meanwhile Pandora was talking in her soft, low voice:

"I went there for no particular reason—just because I had heard two American women talking about it in the hotel at Seville—'a Moorish town,' they called it, and 'wonderfully quaint—no one ought to miss it.' I don't know what there was about Baya, but it raised all the devil in me. I wanted to do the maddest, wickedest things, and couldn't, because I was alone and there was no one to help me. I understood then what a mistaken idea people have when they think it is difficult to be good. It isn't. It's the easiest thing in the world. The difficulty is to be bad. So there I was in that little, queer, walled-in white town, hidden in the hills, just strung up to fever pitch with the novelty of it—of the sunsets that were purpler than grapes, and the sunrises more golden than the New Jerusalem, and the air, and the feeling that nothing—nothing mattered. Only I wanted—desperately—a companion."

"Then if you had not met me——"

"I should have met someone else; but then, of course, the story would have ended quite differently; so I am glad it was you, after all! Tell me——" She leaned her face, so curiously calm for all the depth and passion of her eyes, towards him. "Haven't you been sorry, some little times, that you didn't come back to me next day, after all?"

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He half hated her—but he wished she was not so lovely and so tantalizing with her changes of mood and expression, sometimes looking like a regretful Madonna, and sometimes like the sort of woman who knows a great deal more than she ought to. Meanwhile——

"Haven't you? Haven't you sometimes been a little sorry?" the coaxing, pleading voice went on.

He got up suddenly with a little jarring laugh.

"Sorry?" he said. "Well, I'll tell you the truth, Pandora. You won't like it. Truth's never popular. Yes, I was sorry all that day when I might have been with you; and through the night that followed, the thought of you tortured me—as I have already told you. All that was beastly in me regretted the lost opportunity.

"After that I simply forgot you. I doubt if in these three years I have thought of you half a dozen times. Certainly not more. Otherwise, I should have recognized you on the instant the other night when I first saw you here. You reminded me—but I could not be quite sure. Not at first, until I had seen you in the full light. Even then, if you had not given the show away by your obvious anxiety to avoid me, I should have scarcely dared be sure that Elizabeth's little Pandora was the girl walking about the streets of a Spanish town, alone, picking up acquaintance with a strange man, just for the fun of the thing——"

She was white, and her eyes were blazing. She gazed at him as if his words were unbelievably cruel. "What a prig you are!" she said in a trembling voice.

"All men are prigs where women are concerned."

"I would do the same again if I got the chance!"

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"I quite believe you; and that is where you are so dangerous!"

"Do you mean to say you have never once—*once* thought of it?"

"Hardly ever. You don't seem to realize, my dear," he added more kindly, "that a man may have a dozen such adventures and they will make very little impression upon him. A woman has one, and she can't forget it. It is a way Nature has of safeguarding the race. Shall we go back now?"

He spoke calmly and easily. He had put things on a proper footing, and he was satisfied. He could even look without too much emotion upon the beautiful, troubled face staring at him in incredulous bewilderment.

"Never to have thought of it again!" she said in a whispering, broken way—"the little white dusty road winding up through the hills to the Monastery at the top. And the trees, black as ebony in the moonlight. And the rushing water down in the ravine. And a bird that sang and sang. And you held me in your arms, and you said——"

"Hush!" he broke in almost violently. "I forbid you to think of what I said that night. No doubt I was mad."

At these cruel words she began to weep—not passionately, as he would have expected of her, but in a forlorn and pitiful manner.

For a moment he stood watching her, angry and uncomfortable. But the sight of her hands hiding her face from him touched him, for he never could resist a beautiful hand, and hers were delicate and exquisite.

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He moved up to her again, and drew her hands down from her face.

"Don't cry, my dear," he said; "I am a brute. I do remember that night—perhaps I tried to make myself forget it, because it seemed the wisest thing."

She still sobbed. But he was so close to her now that it seemed a natural thing to lean her head against him.

"Don't cry!"—a silly speech, which had the effect of redoubling her distress.

After a minute, in despair of quieting her otherwise, he did the only thing that seemed left for him to do.

He raised her face to his and kissed it.

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CHAPTER IX

"IF you please, sir," called the voice of Mary pursuing Roger down that which was by courtesy known as the "rose walk," though there was really no reason why it should have been so named at all. "If you please, sir, Miss Elizabeth says, will you kindly just step in to your breakfast and take your porridge?"

"Oh, certainly!" acquiesced Roger cheerily. "I had begun to hope that breakfast might be ready some time soon, quite a while ago; Mary—what do you think of this? I am going to have a pergola down this path—pink ramblers and white, alternately, growing over it. Have these old bushes in the borders flowered since the year One, do you know?"

"I could not say, sir, I am sure. But I don't do with these foreign things myself. If a thing's made abroad, sir, I'm thinking it's better to stay there, and I've said the same to Miss Pandora many a time. Better be Scotch than Spaniyard any day, sir, and know where you are!"

"I see," said Roger after only a moment's bewilderment. "You fear the pergola is to be an importation—like Miss Pandora. But not at all; it shall be purely Scottish. I shall make it myself, with the help of Miss Betty and the village carpenter."

Mary answered with a respectfully dubious smile. "I'll away in and put on the kippers, then, sir—and

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Miss Elizabeth said I was to ask you would you be wishing tea to your breakfast, or cocoa, for the coffee's run out?"

"Tea, Mary, if the coffee has run beyond recall. I have a horror of cocoa. But, while I think of it, let me remind you that Mrs. Seaton ceased to be 'Miss Elizabeth' eight years ago when she married me."

"I'll require to keep mind of it, sir," murmured Mary dutifully.

She had light grey, secretive eyes and an obstinate mouth. It was difficult to tell sometimes whether she was smiling or not. Roger did not know now, but he reflected as he watched her square, sturdy figure turn the corner of the path, that there was something about her walk that made it tolerably sure that she would not be likely to be turned aside from the way she had set out to go.

He walked back to the house.

It was a splendid day. The air was fresh and clean and invigorating, with the savour of the sea in it; the sunlight glancing through the branches of the apple-tree on the lawn made a strong effect of light and shade on the smooth green beneath. An artist would have loved to paint it. Pandora might have painted it had she chosen to turn her attention to these simple things instead of to the more startling subjects she preferred—so he reflected. High up in the blue, the larks were singing. Altogether it was the sort of day to be happy and to look on the bright side of life, and he smiled up at Betty, who, nearly naked and quite unashamed, was dressing by her bedroom window.

"What do you think of my red stays, Daddy?" she

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called down to him cheerily. "I can only wear them with my serge, as they show frough my cottons."

"You young barbarian! Where is your mother?"

"Can't say, dear! Look in her bed!"

But Elizabeth was nowhere to be found, either upstairs or down, and Roger had to resign himself to breakfast with Pandora. He did not want to meet her. Instinct warned him to avoid her, to have nothing to do with her—yet, all the time, at the back of his mind was the glowing remembrance of the little, exquisite hands hiding her face; of the look in her eyes when he had drawn her hands away and kissed her.

He entered the dining-room, wishing most devoutly for the sustaining presence of Elizabeth. Elizabeth and her gay inconsequences would have taken the poignancy from the memory of that kiss and have made it possible for him to greet Pandora as though nothing had happened. Pandora herself, he felt sure, would give him no help in that direction.

He was wrong; she greeted him with a little smile, indifferent and aloof, and went on pouring out the tea.

Hitherto, he had been very distinctly of the opinion that Aunt Tabitha should breakfast in bed. It seemed scarcely decent that anyone as old as she should be down so early, especially as she never wore her false teeth till the afternoon. To-day, it was with relief that he saw her sitting there, as large as life, with a black lace cap placed upon her ebony hair, and mittens of crocheted silk hiding the ancient ugliness of her hands.

She was eating bread and milk as Roger entered the room, and she gave him a grimacing nod.

"Good-morning, my dear!" she said. "It is a

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dismal day, but it may improve. When I was a young girl, the country people round about used to say 'Rain before seven, 'twill be fine before eleven.' But I don't know if that holds good now. Times have changed since the Conservatives have gone out of office!"

"It is not raining, Aunt Tabitha. It has not rained for a fortnight, not since the day before Roger came home," said Pandora lazily.

"Boys will be boys!" pronounced the old creature with an oracular shake of the head. "And I never did like Roger. Never! Pass the honey, my dear!"

Pandora passed it.

"She's in one of her moods," she told Roger, without troubling to lower her voice; indeed, there seemed no need for the precaution, for Miss Lorrimer, having seized upon the honey, was dead to the world.

"What exactly do her moods imply?" he asked, "and how long do they last? She seems to me to have been pretty much the same ever since I came home, yet someone is always saying 'she is in one of her moods.'"

"Yes, she always is. They last for ever. Mary will insist that she is only 'contrary,' but she is always the same, her mind is gone. She doesn't know who you are. I doubt if she knows who I am. She is only sure of Elizabeth and Mary."

He looked curiously at the old lady munching her bread and honey in such apparent unconsciousness. At the same moment, as if suddenly aware of the attention, she glanced up at him and met his eyes with a look of indescribable cunning.

"Don't you trust her!" she chuckled. "She has been

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a hussy and a deceiver from the day I bore her! He! he! he!" and the old creature shook with hideous merriment, ogling Roger the while in a way that made him cold with disgust. He glanced apprehensively at Pandora, but she only shrugged her shoulders with a disdainful air.

"She has always hated me," she said; "and I don't believe she remembers any more who I am—Betty, you can generally manage her. Tell her to be quiet!"

The child slid down from her chair and went round to the old woman.

"There, now, Tabitha, dear," she said in a little soothing voice, "don't you get worried. Dora's most 'noying, isn't she? But we'll eat our brekfus while it's hot, and get out into the garden—you and John and me!"

But for once Aunt Tabitha paid no attention to the little girl. She leaned forward in her chair and glared at Pandora.

"She thinks I don't see her—sitting there—staring at me with her baleful eyes—and her red hair—her red hair—she's come back again to torture me—I can never get rid of her. Oh, never!—oh, never!" She wrung her hands, and her voice died to an indistinct mutter.

Roger rose to his feet.

"Don't be alarmed," said Pandora. "She often has these attacks, but they don't last, and she is never violent. Ring for Mary. She knows what to do with her!"

Mary came and led the old thing away, as docile as a lamb, but with her eyes on Pandora to the last.

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"You would think she might be fond of me," said Pandora indifferently, "when she has done so much for me—but she isn't, she never has been. I am sorry for her. It must be horrid to be old. I hope I shall die when I am forty. Will you have some more tea?"

"Is she like this often?" asked Roger, passing his cup. "She ought to be seen to."

"There's nothing to be done. It's old age. Edward sees to her. She is very seldom like this before Elizabeth. Don't worry!"

"Where is Elizabeth?" he asked, glad to change the subject. "This is the second time since I came home that she has not been in to breakfast. Doesn't she eat like other people?"

"No; only when she is hungry. Not at set times. Both she and I think that nine o'clock in the morning is the time when we least want to see food."

"Elizabeth's gone into St. Brides!" announced Betty—"and there now! she said I wasn't to tell, and it's slipped out. Do you fink it matters, Daddy?"

"You'll have to ask her that; and I won't have you call her by her Christian name. 'Mummy' is what all self-respecting children call their mothers nowadays."

"Sorry, Daddy! I'll try and 'member. But I don't care about doing the same as other kids. It's so common."

"Oh, you needn't worry about that!" replied her father kindly. "You are quite as unlike other kids already as it is good for you to be. And now, if you have both finished breakfast, I am going down into St. Brides to find Elizabeth!"

* * * * *

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It was nearly eleven o'clock when he found her in St. Brides, wandering about on the very fringe of the new Golf Course, where she was liable to be hit by a stray ball at any minute. She was walking slowly with her eyes on the ground and her hands behind her back. She wore no hat, and the sun shone on her hair and made it splendid; like sovereign gold. The sight of it, even from a distance, recalled vividly to Roger's mind the days when first he had loved her. Long ago now, it seemed. It had been on account of her hair that he had first begun to love her. As he drew nearer he perceived that she wore thin house shoes and bore other unmistakable signs of having dressed in a hurry.

He called out to her, and she turned and looked at him vacantly; almost for a moment, as if she did not recognize him. Then she smiled suddenly, but with an exasperated air.

"Why, Roger!" she said—"you annoying creature! Didn't I forbid Mary most strictly to tell anyone where I had gone to! I wanted to be alone. I wanted to finish thinking out chapter xxiii. in peace and quiet. And now here you are chasing all my ideas away. I declare to goodness——"

"Mary did not betray you," interrupted Roger. "Mary was so true to her trust that she pretended she did not know a thing about you. Betty told."

"She has no control over her tongue—that child! Seriously——"

"Seriously, Elizabeth—I want to talk to you. I have come out for that purpose. Do forget your novel for half an hour if such a thing is possible."

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"Why, Roger, are you cross?" inquired his wife, lifting innocent, amazed eyes to his face.

"Yes, very. Do you think you treat me fairly? I have been away for three years and home for two weeks. I have scarcely seen you alone. You have always got Betty with you—or that grinning old mummy, who in decency ought to be shut up. Or else—Pandora."

"Oh, how utterly unreasonable you are! Betty's your own only child. You ought to be glad to have her. Think how many people have nine children instead of only one! As for Aunt Tabitha, she is bound to die soon—and Pandora, she only came the day before yesterday! Besides, she——"

"We'll talk about her again," he said quickly. "It is you I want to talk about—Elizabeth!" His voice was hurried and low. "I do love you—ever since I have known you there has been no one—but you. Don't forsake me now!"

"But of course not!" she moved closer to him and slipped her hand through his arm and pressed it to her. "Why should I forsake you? What can I have been doing," she said in a troubled voice, "to make you feel like this?"

"You have done nothing—nothing! It is I that am not good enough for you—that's the trouble. Say that you love me!"

"Of course I love you!" She looked up at him smiling reassuringly; there was no embarrassment in her brown eyes, only a gentle raillery and some bewilderment. It was not like Roger to talk like this.

"I believe I don't give you enough to eat!" she

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said, thus solving the puzzle to herself. He burst out laughing.

"Quite true!" he said. "Dinner is often scarcely worthy of the name."

"There!" she made a gesture of despair—"I knew it. Remember, I said you ought never to have married me at the time!"

She had not. It was at least a year after the wedding that such an idea had first occurred to her.

"I ought never to have married at all," she went on penitently, "or, if anybody, it should have been a hermit or a vegetarian, or the sort of person who lives upon reform food—though, to be sure, I should think there must be something about that sort of food that would be apt to make one very unattractive and dull—don't you think so?"

"There is nothing dull or unattractive about Pandora and you."

"Oh, Pandora and I! Living alone we certainly do get into the way of eating scraps, there's no doubt of it. Cigarettes, and the fag end of a beefsteak-pie, does for us—or a meal of bread and honey and cocoa. And it suits the children too. I often lump Aunt Tabitha in with Betty," she added by way of explanation, "and call her a child too. She is one. Then, all of a sudden, you come home, and we forget that men are different, and expect to be studied and propitiated with stodgy old joints and meals punctual and done to a turn, and whisky, etc.

"I am a brute, Roger, and a selfish one at that, with my head always full of my own imaginings and nonsense. And the worst of it all is that they are so

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real to me that I can't put them out!" She rubbed her cheek on his sleeve and smiled up at him with apologetic, misty eyes.

She was very sweet; really she looked scarcely older than she had done eight years ago, when he had married her. If the place had not been so public, he would have stooped and kissed her.

They went down on to the shore. There was a long, bare stretch of brown sand before them. The tide was far out, and the distant hills were blue and beautiful in the clear morning sunlight.

They walked in silence for a few minutes. Elizabeth, her eyes upon the ground, was planning a dinner for that very night that should wipe out the memory of past disgraces. "Edward shall be asked," she said to herself, "and that will give him a chance with Pandora. Surely there are other soups than lentil and brown? Mary will know! Roger—are there such things as 'devils on horseback,' and, if so, how do they get there?"

"Angels, not devils; and very good they are, but I haven't the slightest idea of what goes to the making of them, my dear. Elizabeth, do you and Pandora wander about without your hats as a matter of principle? I don't like to find fault, but it does remind me of summer visitors."

Elizabeth stopped short, and clapped her hands to her head with a cry of dismay.

"But, of course, I had a hat on! My new purple! I got it in Edinburgh. It cost 37s. 6d., and isn't paid for. Oh, Roger—where, where have I put it?"

"My dearest girl! How can I tell you? You

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haven't by any chance been bathing?" He looked her up and down critically. "You look sort of unfinished," he commented—"you have only got slippers on."

"Oh! well, I thought my feet felt funny. No—of course I haven't been bathing. There are no machines out. Roger, you will drive me absolutely mad if you stand there looking stolid. Ah! I remember now, I sat down on one of these hillocks close by the links. More than likely I took it off then."

They retraced their steps in the direction of the hillocks. Roger lit a cigarette.

"Elizabeth," he began rather awkwardly—"about Pandora."

"Well—what about Pandora? Oh!" she broke off suddenly and clutched his arm.

"Roger!" she said in a thrilling whisper. "See that—creature coming towards us?" and she pointed towards the figure of a girl walking slowly in their direction.

Roger looked. "Well?" he questioned.

"Why, she has found my hat and is wearing it! What shall I do? Shall I claim it?"

He caught her arm firmly. "You'll do no such thing," he said. "Probably you are mistaken. In any case you can't go up to a strange girl and tax her with having picked up your hat. She would think you mad, or that you were accusing her of stealing."

"But I am not mistaken! How can one be mistaken about one's own hat? Purple, with a rose bow. I'd know it in a million. Besides, she is not a strange girl—only too familiar. She is a horrid creature called

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Kate Wilbur. Edward use to flirt with her. She tried her very best to marry him, and failed!"

Roger suffered anguish during this recital, lest it should be overheard by the approaching Miss Wilbur, who could certainly have been in no doubt that she was the subject of their conversation. She advanced with a look of self-conscious disdain upon her features which were somewhat overshadowed by the purple hat.

Upon this headgear Elizabeth fixed a withering and indignant gaze; it was returned with interest, and Roger, under the impression that the two ladies were bowing to each other, raised his cap.

"Idiot!" burst out his wife, when they were scarcely out of earshot—"Haven't I been cutting her for years, or at any rate months?"

"But why?"

"Why not? Ask another! Just because! And anyway she is odious and looks down on Pandora and me."

"But——"

"Yes, I know. It's just what I was telling you the other day. It's a thousand pities, but it can't be helped."

Roger walked a few paces in silence, then—"It must be helped," he said in a low voice, or else we leave this place and begin all over again—you and I and Betty." He paused, and added in a still lower voice, "without Pandora."

Elizabeth stopped dead and stared at him in astonishment. "Roger!" she exclaimed, "are you so young, so optimistic, so ignorant of life as to imagine that at my age—thirty-five—one can put everything behind

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one and begin again as easily as all that? My poor boy! It can't be done! One's past is one's present and one's future. Wherever I went I should be the same Elizabeth at whom people look askance."

She looked at him, half amused, half apologetic. "Indeed I can't help it!" she said. "I can't be born again!"

"You are altogether wrong." He spoke all the more doggedly because he had an inkling that she was painfully right. "You are impulsive and unconventional and sometimes foolish. Elizabeth, forgive my plain speaking, dear. They are lovable faults; easy faults for a woman to contract when she is young and pretty and lives alone. But what you are really paying is somebody else's bill. If I were to get a shore billet somewhere——"

"Oh!" said Elizabeth eagerly—"you might be made coastguard here, at St. Brides. I'd like that. I believe Captain Ward's time is nearly up. I should think they would be thankful to get you after Captain Ward."

"That was hardly what I meant."

"I know it wasn't. What you meant was that I should cast off poor old Tabitha and Pandora."

"You need not cast off Aunt Tabitha. Only I should have thought she was too old to travel."

"So she is, and that's why I want to stay on here with her. I know she has been a gay dog in her day—though nobody would think it to look at her now—and she is certainly a most unattractive old person, but, after all, Roger, she is the only mother I have ever known."

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Privately, Roger thought that Elizabeth would have got on just as well without such a parent as old Miss Lorrimer had been.

"She is bound to die pretty soon," she finished unconcernedly, "and until then she must stay with us, or we with her, Roger."

"As you please, my dear. But Pandora——"

She turned and looked at him slowly, earnestly. "You don't like my little Pandora," she said. "Why—I don't know. I can't think. What has she ever done to make you dislike her as you do?—as you did even before you ever knew her?"

He would rather not have answered, but her questioning eyes compelled him.

"I don't dislike her. I used to be jealous of her, as you know, long ago."

"Yes—how absurd you were!" she smiled at him with indulgent tenderness. Jealousy on the part of the man one loves is a fault most women can forgive.

"Now that I know her, I find her a most attractive girl, but—I have a feeling, Elizabeth—very strong—that we should be happier without her."

Elizabeth had not that feeling at all. Quite the reverse. To imagine life without Pandora made her feel downcast and cold.

"Why should you have these dreadful ideas?" she asked. "Why should you want to separate Pandora and me?"

"I suppose I don't trust her," he said; and the memory of Pandora's beautiful, tearful eyes recurred to him and showed him in a flash that it was himself that he did not trust. He walked on, a prey to conflicting

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emotions; torn with a desire that he strove to repudiate and crush.

"But why?" Elizabeth insisted. "You admit you don't dislike her; you admit you find her attractive. You have *a feeling*, men ought to be above feelings!"

"If you like it better, I have the certainty that Pandora does things that get her talked about here, in St. Brides, and you suffer for it!"

"Talked about. My *dear* Roger! Will you just think for one moment of the women who are *not* talked about, and then ask yourself if they are to be envied. Do you know," went on Elizabeth with great calm, "what it means *not* to be talked about? It means to be middle-aged and dowdy; it means to be the kind of woman that a man can pass in the street without knowing it—the sort of woman you might be in the room with for three-quarters of an hour and never see her till she went out. The kind who is 'bright' and 'amiable' and 'a good sort' and whose hair is mousey, and teeth——"

"Stop!" entreated Roger. "I quite understand. It seems inevitable that you and Pandora should be talked about."

"And you will try and be more reasonable about her?"

He gave a little despairing laugh, and she pressed his arm encouragingly.

"Don't say anything more to worry me," she said—"I feel quite ill."

Had he not been so much engrossed in his own thoughts he would have seen that her face had grown very white and that her steps were lagging.

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"Don't say anything more against Pandora," she entreated wearily.

"If you only knew," he began harshly and stopped, arrested suddenly by the sight of tears in Elizabeth's eyes. Eight years of matrimony had not taught him to harden his heart to a sight so pathetic.

"My dear," he urged, "don't distress yourself. I have been a brute. The fact is—Pandora—she is a perpetual enigma. A riddle I can't solve and can't get out of my mind. Whether I like or dislike her, trust or distrust her — what does it matter? I want to forget her—I want to be alone for a time with just you. Surely you can understand that, Elizabeth?"

"Yes—I understand," she said in a faint voice. "Let me take your arm, Roger; I am horribly tired—and we will rest at Edward's for half an hour." She smiled at him gratefully. "After all," she thought, "it is something to have a husband who wants to be alone with you all the time, even though you have been married eight years!"

"Pandora is sure to be married soon!" she told him reassuringly. "Do I look dreadfully dishevelled for passing through the town, dear?"

"Yes, a little. Dry your eyes, or people will think we have been quarrelling."

Roger was ready to understand that the actions of his wife must certainly be liable to command attention. As they passed along the street people cast curious glances at them, or stared openly. Elizabeth, herself, seemed unaware of the attention she was attracting. She had forgotten her beaded house

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slippers and the hat she had lost. It was left to Roger to be acutely conscious of her appearance.

At Edward's house she dropped his arm and, pushing wide the half-open door, walked in.

"I am going to give a beano to-night!" she announced, smiling back at him over her shoulder. "A real proper one, with as many courses as Mary can manage, just to show you that we can do things properly if we choose. I shall ask Edward, because since you are set upon getting rid of my little Pandora, the sooner they fix things up the better!"

"But Elizabeth——"

However, Elizabeth was half-way up the stairs, and he had to follow her; and, presently, guided by the sound of her voice, he entered Edward's nice, sunlit room, where Edward himself had been engaged most of the morning in a desperate attempt to write a poem about Pandora.

He sprang up with evident relief on the entrance of Elizabeth, and the invitation for the evening's entertainment was given and accepted before Roger entered.

"Evening dress optional!" Elizabeth was saying—"that is to say, Pandora and I will wear it, because we both know we look our best—so will Tabitha, because, poor old love, she thinks she does too. But men really look fully as nice in any old tweed thing. That's the worst of you—and the best of us! Gracious! look at the time! And I haven't had breakfast yet; twelve o'clock! Edward, why aren't you up and doing?" She broke off—"A big, strong man like you to be writing poems at this hour of the day; it's wicked!"

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She looked at the sheet of paper lying on the table, scrawled over in his neat, minute handwriting. "What rhymes with Pandora?" she asked with a little laugh.

"Only Flora and Laura and Cora—other women's names," he said ruefully. "I give it up as a bad job. What would you make of it?"

"Neither Flora, or Laura, or Cora is half as sweet as Pandora!" hummed Elizabeth. "Oh!"—she staggered back suddenly against the table and put out her hand in a groping way as though she could not see.

Roger sprang forward as she was on the point of falling, and pushed her into a chair by the window—but Edward picked her up and, carrying her to a low, deep couch, laid her flat.

"You'll find brandy back there in the cupboard," he said, with a backward jerk of the head, and, presently, as he held the glass to her lips, he said almost angrily—

"When will you learn to take care of yourself?"

"Oh, take the beastly stuff away! I never could abide it!" murmured Elizabeth, smiling weakly past him at Roger's anxious face looking down at her. "Tell him there's nothing wrong with me, Edward!"

"She does too much and lives on her nerves and very little else, that's what it is," said Rattray, and he watched her with a concerned absorbed face that would have made his fortune had he troubled to go in for his profession seriously.

"Make her drink more brandy," suggested Roger.

"No, I won't. Not another drop!" She sat up and pushed the hair back from her forehead. She looked wan and tired, but she laughed at their two solemn

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faces and held out a hand to each. "Ring the bell and have up some brekky!" she said. "I 'spect I'm hungry!"

Edward pulled the bell, and Mrs. Smiley came panting up the stairs, both indignant and curious at the urgency of the summons. The indignation deepened when her master ordered her to bring up coffee, hot and strong, and whatever food she could lay her hands on; she looked unutterable things, for she disapproved of Mrs. Seaton.

"Have the coffee black," recommended Elizabeth, "and maybe I'll have a liqueur in it, for I feel as if it were twelve midnight and I had been writing for nine hours on nothing but a sardine. I'll have a little wee thin piece of brown bread and butter, too, Mrs. Smiley; not a thing else."

"Cold chicken—I know there is cold chicken, and you like that, Elizabeth."

Mrs. Smiley backed to the door and blinked slowly three times. "The cat, sir——" she said.

"Neither cats nor chickens—bring me brown bread and butter!" pleaded Elizabeth.

She leaned her head back on the cushions. She was very tired.

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CHAPTER X

AT 3.30 Elizabeth woke with a start and remembered to-night's dinner.

"Oh, drat it all!" she murmured, and lay on her back looking at the faded paper on the wall. Bunches of roses tied up with blue ribbon that looped together in a silly way and joined each bunch to his neighbour —a maddening pattern capable of being counted and arranged in squares and triangles and figures of five, as in a pack of cards.

The regularity of the scheme was broken by a picture of a girl sitting in her birthday dress upon the banks of a stream; by an enlarged photograph of Betty wearing an unnatural expression of saintliness; the etching of a cathedral doorway, and by a small print of Elizabeth's great-grandfather, who had been something of a scoundrel in the days of Lord Nelson (under whom he had served), and for whom she cherished an unreasoning and ardent hero worship.

The sun streamed in through the open window, bringing with it the scent of sweetbriar and newly cut grass, for "the man"—a person for whom Elizabeth cherished a deep animosity because he came and went as he chose, and nothing would prevent him, smoked a clay pipe and wrought havoc with a pruning knife and hob-nailed boots, and incidentally did a few neces-

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sary jobs—had elected to come to-day to tidy up. The sound of the mowing machine made a soothing, dreamy sound that mingled pleasantly with her dreams.

A blackbird sang on a bough of the apple-tree outside the window. "What are you doing? What are you doing?" it repeated with shrill insistence.

"What, indeed!" Elizabeth answered to herself, a little smile, half bitter, half melancholy, on her lips. "If only I wasn't so desperately afraid of crocking up just now I certainly shouldn't be lying here——" She put out her hand and rang a little brass bell that stood on the table by her bedside.

As promptly as if she had been a sentinel outside in the passage, Mary came in and very quietly shut the door after her.

"Feeling better, Miss Elizabeth, dear?" she inquired tenderly.

"Quite all right, thanks." Elizabeth moved her head with weary impatience on the pillow. "I didn't really feel ill—only tired—tired—tired! When I have finished this book, Mary, I'll never write another. Then I suppose I shall turn into a model wife and mother by way of a change," and Elizabeth smiled at the prospect, though her face grew rather sad too. "The worst of it is model people are so desperately dull!" she said. "I should very soon not be able to endure myself! Mary, do you know what I want?"

"A cup of tea, Miss Elizabeth? The kettle's on the boil."

"No—nothing to eat or drink. To lie down in a hayfield thick with violets and narcissi. Of course such things as hay and violets and narcissi all together

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simply *aren't*, but that's why I want them; and I'd like to drowse off into that heavenly sort of sleep where you are not really asleep but only in that state when all things are possible, and the nice things you want come true, and then—just at the critical moment—instead of waking to this work-a-day world, to be borne up—up—into a twilight sky of saffron and misty pink and opal, and to wake at last in the Elysian fields among the Immortals! There, Mary! That's the little, unattainable thing I crave for——"

"Well, I never!" ejaculated Mary. "You can't be well, Miss Elizabeth! Will I send for Dr. Rattray?"

"No. He is coming to-night to dinner, and I have already seen him this morning and had brandy forced upon me. Listen, Mary; I have simply been lying here dreaming of menus and what sort of soup to have. And I can't. You've got to help me. Is there nothing new in the beast line? I mean, of course, the edible beast. This is to be an extra special dinner for two reasons: First, the Captain has complained; second—prepare yourself for a great surprise—have you guessed anything lately about Pandora?"

"It'd be a clever person would guess anything about Miss Pandora but what she had a mind for them to know," returned Mary darkly.

"Well, perhaps you are right! Mr. Edward wants her to marry him. Whether she wants to marry him or not, Mary, the tongue of man could not say. But I think she has consented, though the only thing she has told me about it is that she wishes she had never been born! Of course, that's absurd. She doesn't; she looks happy enough, and kind of mazed, too—the

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way people do when they are in love. And there's no one for her to be in love with excepting Mr. Edward."

"Seemingly not, Miss Elizabeth. Will you be wishing a three-course dinner, then?"

"Oh, more! Far more. And write 'Champagne' on the slate and hang it in the hall, so that perchance the Captain's eyes may fall upon it and he be minded thereby to provide a bottle thereof."

Mary sat down on a chair by the bedside and stared at Elizabeth. Waves indicative of thought passed over her face; she was possessed of dozens of sterling qualities, but had no bright ideas—no inspirations.

"There's chops in the house!" she said at last—"loin chops."

"But, Mary—*chops!* Chops won't do at all! At least if they are chops you must disguise them so that nobody could possibly tell. The Captain says he was once at a dinner party in a remote bungalow in Ceylon where he wasn't expected. And there were five courses, and four of them had chicken in them, done so cunningly that it seemed like a different sort of animal each time. Now, if there are chops you must do conjuring tricks with them like that. Couldn't you put frills on their legs and call them cutlets?"

Mary looked dubious—but she might ring up Wilson and tell him to send that boy of his up with a nice little roast, and quick about it.

"Yes, a nice little roast. The very thing! Men always like roasts—beef for preference. And fish—what about fish, Mary? With the sea at our very doors I can't help thinking we ought to get fish easily enough. Yet I can think of nothing but herring——"

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"There's salmon—1s. 10d. the pound it is; but if it's an occasion——"

"It is an occasion, Mary. Let it be salmon! We won't worry about soup; but couldn't you fluff up a sort of omelet, or cheesestraws, or something light and flakey, to end up with?"

Mary looked unutterable things. Her talent lay very decidedly *not* in the fluffing up of things light and flakey. Rather, she was renowned for a good substantial dumpling made in a cloth and with raisins in it. She had made an omelet once—two years ago—the day Betty took the mumps—but it had seemed "unlucky like," and she had never tried another.

"As for cheesestraws, mem, I've heard tell of them, and I can but do my best. There's nobody can do more!"

When Mary said "mem" it was a bad sign, but Elizabeth never wasted time in worrying over such a triviality as dinner.

"I have every confidence in you, Mary!" she said. "And now, if you would like to be worth your weight in gold, you might get me that cup of tea you were talking about a few minutes back!"

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CHAPTER XI

MRS. MILES was a tall woman with abundant bright red hair, rather cold light eyes, and an air about her which seemed to say that she was accustomed to attention. She was now a little over fifty, but in a judicious light she looked less, for her figure was slight and graceful. Her face, however, had a tired and somewhat disappointed expression, and although people frequently spoke of her as a sweet woman, there was really no reason why they should have done so, for gentleness and amiability had never been her long suit, and now constant ill-health put sweetness out of the question for one of her temperament.

She lived by herself at Fairview, a few miles out of St. Brides, had hosts of acquaintances and no friends, and was supposed to be inconsolable for the death of the late Mr. Miles—though in view of his portrait which hung in the dining-room, one could not help wondering if this could really be. However, he had been rich—very rich, and his money had enabled his widow to emerge from Manchester and buy Fairview, to keep motors, wear expensive furs and jewels, and give big entertainments, and be one of the most sought-after people in St. Brides.

As she was one of these women who are distinctly nicer to men than to her own sex, Roger had liked her.

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At Gibraltar a few years ago he had thought her a pretty, pathetic little woman, evidently very much cut up at the death of her husband. On meeting her again in Edinburgh he had been delighted to learn that she now lived at St. Brides. He hoped that she and Elizabeth would become great friends; he thought that she was just the sort of woman whose society would do his wife good. Poor, innocent Roger! The two women were secretly as antagonistic to each other as cat and dog.

However, within a day or two of his return, she wrote a gracious note to Mrs. Seaton explaining that she had returned from Edinburgh in bad health, which obliged her to rest most of the afternoon, and therefore made calling a difficulty, but would Mrs. Seaton waive ceremony and come with her husband to a garden party which she was giving on the Wednesday of next week?

The note had arrived whilst Elizabeth was in difficulties with the love affairs of Ernest and Hermione, and she had tossed it aside with an exclamation of impatience and forgotten to answer it.

On the same afternoon that she was planning the details of her dinner party, Mrs. Miles made an exception to her rule—which was, perhaps, not so stringent after all—of resting, and ordered the red car to be brought round. It was a peculiarity of hers that she preferred to be without the chauffeur. She often drove into St. Brides and returned quite late at night by herself. In anybody else this would have been thought very extraordinary, but Mrs. Miles was understood to be very independent. She had travelled about the Continent without even a maid.

This afternoon she did some shopping, took the car

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to the garage, and then made her way in a leisurely, graceful fashion down Abbey Street to see Edward Rattray. She met one or two people on the way and increased her invitations for the garden party. For Mrs. Miles never made lists; she just asked those whom she happened to remember at the moment, so that some people found themselves with two invitations and some with none at all; and envy, hatred, and malice, and all uncharitableness followed in the wake of her parties.

This time Mrs. Mackenzie had been forgotten, but luckily the sight of her with the best looking of her plain daughters reminded Mrs. Miles. They were on opposite sides of the street, but Mrs. Miles beckoned to the elder lady, who obediently hurried across.

"Too bad to make Mohammed come to the mountain, but you'll excuse me, I know!" she said with a faintly ironical smile, that certainly gave point to Mrs. Mackenzie's preponderance of fat. "My wretched health makes it impossible for me to go a step further than necessary," she added. "Do you think me very rude?"

Possibly Mrs. Mackenzie thought her intolerable, but the fact that she (Mrs. Miles) was clad in beautifully cut and becoming garments, was the mistress of Fairview, and was giving a big garden party on Wednesday, whilst she (Mrs. Mackenzie) had six unmarried daughters, very little money, was clad at the moment in a coat and skirt of the summer before last, and was passionately anxious for invitations to this and all other entertainments given at Fairview, made it impossible for her to admit it even to herself. So she said with as good a grace as she could summon to her aid:

"Not at all, dear Mrs. Miles! So glad of the oppor-

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tunity to inquire for you. As a matter of fact, I and Marie—this is Marie, my third girl—were coming to call for you this very afternoon!"

"Then don't! I never see people unless I particularly want them. When I am at home I rest. Just now I am on my way to the Doctor, and I am glad to meet you because you can tell me about him. But first of all——" she broke off to say with the careless, intimate smile that made one see that she ought by rights to be a very fascinating woman if she were to take the trouble to be agreeable—"I want you to promise that you will come and bring this daughter of yours to my party on Wednesday afternoon. I don't think I have seen you at Fairview before," she said, kindly turning to Marie, and all unaware that the girl, made painfully aware of her own plainness and her old-fashioned clothes, was hating her fiercely and calling her a patronizing beast under her breath.

"I have been to Fairview twice," she said huskily, but her mother interrupted by accepting the invitation with an almost audible sigh of relief.

"We had heard about the party," she exclaimed, "and we shall be more than pleased to come! All St. Brides is going and praying for a fine day, I hear. A party at Fairview is quite an event, I assure you, dear Mrs. Miles!"

"Is it?" returned Mrs. Miles with a slight relapse from her graciousness, and looking wearily up the street. "And that reminds me——"

"I wonder—now I wonder, if I might bring two girls—Eva—how Eva would love to come! I mention her because there is a *reason*, and yet another reason why

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Marie would be distressed if she were to be left behind——"

"Mother! I am sure——"

"Oh, bring her by all means! Bring them both. I only hope there will be a *reason*, as you call it, for every girl that comes; but I doubt it. Which brings me back to Edward Rattray," she added hastily, seeing signs of another interruption. "I only know him as 'Edward,' not as Dr. Rattray at all. Of course he is very charming indeed, and his blue eyes are so persuasive they would raise one from the dead: yet one doesn't hear much about him—as a doctor, I mean. Of course, otherwise he is the most popular man in St. Brides. And isn't he a nephew of yours, or something?"

"A nephew of my dear husband's, and *he* thought highly of his abilities. And clever! He could do *anything* if he chose, Mrs. Miles—I assure you of that. Marie can tell you how clever he is!" she added, with an arch look at her unhappy daughter, who rewarded the attention by turning a deep purple.

"I can't!" she snapped. "I've never been ill in my life except a sprained thumb, and he bandaged it too tight. He has scarcely any patients."

"I shall go to him. My doctor in Edinburgh recommended Dr. Walker. He said he was the best. But it is someone to cheer me up I want, not to depress me with a frock-coat and a stethoscope. I shall go along to see him now!"

But before she could break away, Mrs. Mackenzie had laid a podgy hand upon her arm.

"Oh, I am so glad!" she beamed up at Mrs. Miles. "He is such a dear boy, Edward! I wonder—might

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I say something to you—*strictly* between ourselves, Mrs. Miles? Marie, run on, darling; I'll join you directly."

Marie executed a turning movement, and with a scowling face gazed through the window of a jeweller's shop, whilst her anxious parent walked on a few steps with Mrs. Miles, whose air of polite attention had become very perfunctory indeed.

"It is only this, dear Mrs. Miles. You are a woman of the world with an immense influence—ah yes, I know it!" she insisted playfully, as her companion made a bored gesture of dissent. "Now, I know, too, that not ten minutes ago that impossible young person whom Elizabeth Seaton adopted has gone into Edward Rattray's house. Think of it—an unmarried girl into the house of a bachelor—I see that you are shocked!"

"I am sorry I should seem so, because the morals of —of the girl you mention concern me in no way. Might she, however, not be going to consult Dr. Rattray just as I am myself?"

"You are so charitable, Mrs. Miles! I am afraid not. Her health is perfect. I happen to know it. No, I only mention it to warn you that you will find her there. Such a—well, *peculiar* girl. Fast, I am afraid." Mrs. Mackenzie lowered her voice and glanced anxiously over her shoulder as though she had said something improper and feared that her own innocent daughter might be contaminated by the sound of the word.

Marie had heard, and what she was muttering to herself at the moment would have flustered her good mother very considerably could she have overheard the innocent daughter's remarks. "Fast, indeed! As

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though I wouldn't give my ears to be fast too, and have the good time Pandora does, if I had the chance!" she was saying scornfully.

"Yes; but why should I be warned?" questioned Mrs. Miles petulantly. "I feel perfectly faint and ill with the heat of the sun. I care absolutely nothing for this girl and her behaviour!"

"Oh, of course not! Why should you? A girl, I am sure, you would detest! No, no—I only wondered whether you, as a woman of the world, might not show my poor nephew, just with a glance of the eye, you know, as you walk into the room, how far beneath contempt you think Pandora and all her kind!" In her anxiety Mrs. Mackenzie's voice rose in a peculiarly penetrating whisper; she put her face close to Mrs. Miles', and her head shook.

Mrs. Miles edged away from her, distaste in her eyes. All this agitation because Pandora had succeeded where her own plain girls had failed!

"I don't look upon her as beneath contempt at all!" she said coldly. "She is a beautiful girl; probably fascinating, and therefore to be reckoned with. And I only know that I have not the least intention of walking into Edward Rattray's room disguised as a moral censor. Thank God, I am the keeper of no man's conscience but my own! And now, Mrs. Mackenzie, if you don't let me go I shall drop down in a faint at your feet with the sun beating down on my head."

Mrs. Mackenzie, looking at her sharply, saw that it was no mere excuse to get away; there was a spot of colour in each cheek which served to accentuate the haggard pallor of her face. Her eyes shone feverishly.

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She walked on leaving the older lady to stare after her uneasily, aware that she had annoyed her and alienated her sympathy instead of gaining it. She was, therefore, consumed with fury against the unconscious Pandora, and extremely irritable with Marie, on whom she rounded in no measured terms for looking sulky.

"Never expect to be popular if you don't cultivate a cheerful expression!" she preached as they turned, appropriately enough, into Church Street.

Filial respect, or more probably lack of moral courage, prevented Marie from making a suitable rejoinder, but to herself she nursed the bitter reflection that it is difficult to look cheerful when you are going home to tea with your own family, and happen to be aware that the girl you hate and admire beyond words is partaking of that meal in a cosy tête-à-tête with the man your soul yearns to possess.

To make matters worse for poor Marie, her spirit yearned after frivolity and attractiveness, whilst her feet led her always in the dull ways of conventionality.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Miles was being admitted with ceremony by the obsequious Mrs. Smiley, who led the way upstairs, rustling her silk petticoat, and inwardly rejoicing that a third person had come to spoil "that Miss Pandora's little game."

"Mistress Miles!" she announced, and flung open the door.

Mrs. Miles entered, seeing with one swift glance as she made a languid advance towards Edward, that Pandora was lounging back on the couch with her feet up; that she was smoking a cigarette; that her hat was off; and that she was, and continued to be, calm and

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unruffled in spite of the interruption, whilst with Edward it was exactly the opposite.

"I hope I am not interrupting you *too* much!" she said maliciously.

Pandora did not answer, but went on smoking and looking at Mrs. Miles through half-closed eyes.

Edward, after a moment's hesitation, said:

"Not a bit. Delighted to see you. Sit down, won't you?"

Mrs. Miles obeyed in a mechanical, lifeless sort of way. She looked dead tired, and gradually there crept over her a feeling of constraint and embarrassment quite new to her. She was acutely aware of Pandora's quiet gaze. With something of an effort, she turned her head presently and met it.

The two women looked at each other without recognition. They had met before, several times, but Mrs. Miles had always avoided the girl; they had been introduced, and she had cut her and deliberately ignored her.

Now, face to face with her in Edward Rattray's room, she was suddenly aware that she could ignore her no longer. The girl's beauty and personality impressed themselves upon her. Looking into the deep, calm eyes of Pandora, she was shaken to the depths by an unexpected memory—the memory of her own youth, her own happiness, assailed her. Life, she certainly knew, was ebbing from her. A passionate regret surged through her; she could have shed tears, only to see Pandora's beautiful black eyes soften in pity. She would have liked to make a wild appeal to her for sympathy, even for love; but of course these things were quite impossible to her.

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To be cynical, distrustful, and cold was second nature to her, and she acted as she had trained herself to act, and sat there with a faintly ironical smile curving her pale lips.

"I'm afraid you are not well!" remarked Edward, acutely conscious that something was wrong. "Did you by any chance come to see me professionally?"

"Yes, partly. And partly to beg a cup of tea from you. The truth is I am exhausted with the chatter of your good aunt. She caught me out there in the sun and kept me till I was half baked. But won't you introduce me? I am afraid I don't know you, except by your Christian name, my dear!"

Her voice, as she turned again to Pandora, was quite appealing. The longing to see the deep eyes soften obsessed her.

"I only have a Christian name—at present!" returned Pandora coolly. "And surely we have been introduced several times already?"

"Twice. Yes, I have been stupid, but it won't happen again——"

Her face relaxed into a smile of satisfaction, for Pandora's eyes had softened graciously. She leaned back in her chair and turned once more to Edward, without bothering any more about the introduction she had asked for.

"As for you," she said, "I only want you to come and see me now and then by way of cheering me up. You are not one of these tiresome doctors who want to operate or try silly experiments on their patients, are you? For I would really rather die a natural death; and that's why, when Dr. Graham, in Edinburgh,

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recommended me to go to Dr. Walker here, I told him straight that I wouldn't! There's nothing the matter with me but ennui, and Dr. Walker doesn't look the sort to cure that. Come and see me to-morrow!"

"Since you are here, wouldn't you perhaps rather——"

"No. Now don't worry me, please! I want to have tea and to forget that you are a doctor. It's easy enough as a rule."

Tea came in, and Pandora poured out, moving about with a lithe and careless charm which kept Edward watching her with infatuated eyes that could not hide their passionate longing. He wished to goodness that Mrs. Miles would go, but Mrs. Miles was not so kind; she showed no inclination to move. She asked for cushions and leaned back against them, looking interesting and comfortable and at peace with the world.

She still watched the girl with half wistful, half longing gaze, but the bitterness had gone from it, conjured away by the tea and the restfulness of the deep armchair and by the atmosphere of cheeriness and goodwill which always seemed to surround Edward. After all, she found herself thinking, if life were over, what matter? She had had her day, and, given her choice, she would not have lived it through again. The keenest joys had been overbalanced by the pain. Nothing had been quite worth while, and here she was at the end of all things, weary and lonely, clinging forlornly to a mistake still. Nothing but the creature comforts left! Well, nobody could say that they were not real enough, at any rate! And something better might await one in the next world—who could tell?

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Pandora broke in on her musings. "Shall I give you more tea, Mrs. Miles?"

"Yes, and a cream cake. Then tell me what you are thinking about. Are they the long, long thoughts youth is supposed to have?"

"I was only thinking how different you are to what Elizabeth and I supposed! You have always been horrid to us."

"Very likely. I have got into the way of being horrid to people. As a rule they bore me."

"But Elizabeth and I have never bored you, so that can't have been your reason for cutting us."

"You are right. It was not. You and Mrs. Seaton have been accused of committing a great many deadly sins, but never of being bores. Forgive me for making you angry—it was to see your eyes flash. What eyes you have! They weren't made in England, I'm sure?"

"No—in Spain!" returned Pandora, her anger vanishing instantly at the compliment. She smiled, looking as friendly as anyone could have desired. "I am not English really, you know," she went on—"the Seatons are no relation to me. Elizabeth is my best friend in the world, but that's all."

"I have heard your story. It is—well, unusual. But you are unusual, and so is Mrs. Seaton——"

"Is that the reason why you have always avoided us, then, and made other people avoid us? Oh, of course we knew! Mrs. Muir told us."

Mrs. Miles grew faintly pink, but she shrugged her shoulders in a careless, quite unembarrassed way. "Oh, very likely," she said. "It was thoughtless of me, and I am sorry; but the truth is I saw no reason at all why

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I should be nice to you, or know you, or bother about you in any way."

"Are you trying to make me angry again?"

"No, I don't think you are so stupid as to be angry. I am simply a woman who never troubles to be nice to people she doesn't like. I—had a prejudice against you before. Now I know you and like you. *Voilà tout!* I shall certainly never say any nasty things about you again. I should like to be friends with you—and Elizabeth Seaton."

Pandora sat silent. Mrs. Miles did not attract her, she scarcely knew why, and she wished she had not come here to Edward Rattray's. They had been having such a pleasant afternoon together—he and she—for Pandora always found it exciting to listen to Edward's love, even though she could not return it; then she must needs come—this Mrs. Miles—to interrupt them. Pandora had never really cared a bit whether she was nice to Elizabeth and herself or not. On the whole, she preferred not to know her.

So she was silent, gazing with thoughtful eyes at Edward, who had lit a cigarette, and who, Pandora knew, was waiting very patiently until Mrs. Miles should see fit to leave them alone again.

"You see, the thing is," Mrs. Miles went on in her languid tired voice, "I had no idea, until I met Roger Seaton in Edinburgh, that Elizabeth Seaton was his wife, or I should have ca—asked her to come and see me long ago. I like him. There's something about him—just out of reach—that one can't get at. Perhaps if one could, that would be the end of one's interest in him. As it is, you've to keep thinking of him. Well, I have

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written to his wife and asked them both to my party on Wednesday. You must come too, of course. Edward, bring her, won't you?"

"Only too pleased," said Edward, who had hitherto not intended going himself. "I'll run her over in my car, Mrs. Miles."

"I hate parties," Pandora demurred. "I never seem to have the right dress on! I'll only come if Elizabeth does, and she simply hates them too. We all do but Aunt Tabitha!"

"Aunt Tabitha?"

"Yes. Elizabeth's aunt—A.D. 1837, or even more previous. She'd love to come, only she doesn't always behave very well."

"Don't bring her!" breathed Mrs. Miles. "I—I rather hate old people. It's another of the horrid things about me that I can't help. I—what is she like?"

She got up as she spoke and began fumbling round the cushions in the chair for her gloves and her handkerchief as though she neither expected nor wanted an answer.

"I must go now," she added hurriedly. "I have stayed such a long time, but I feel ever so much better! Edward, don't forget to come and see me to-morrow, and go on downstairs now and open the door for me."

When he had gone, she took Pandora's hand in hers and looked at her steadily.

"You are going to marry Edward, aren't you?" she asked.

"Everything seems to point that way," the girl admitted stiffly. "But I don't see——"

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"What right I have to ask? None. I would like you to be happy—for some silly reason—very likely only because you remind me of my own long-ago, when I thought I was going to be happy myself, ever after! I would like to kiss you, but I see you would hate it. Goodbye! Come on Wednesday, for I am going away soon, and we may not meet again!"

She dropped Pandora's hand and went out of the room.

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CHAPTER XII

"ELIZABETH!" said Pandora a few hours later, "I believe I am lacking in the moral sense!"

"Are you indeed!" replied Mrs. Seaton imperturbably—"and do you find it a great want, Honey?"

She had her feet up on the couch and was resting until Edward came; she was busy polishing her fingernails the while. She still looked pale after her fatigues of the morning, only her eyes were very bright and smiling.

Pandora walked up and down the room restlessly. She wore a thin black dress cut very low at the back in a way that showed off her beautiful shoulders to advantage, and against which her skin was as white as alabaster. She stopped in her pacing and stood beside Elizabeth.

"I do—and I don't!" she said. "I never worried about it before, but now, quite suddenly, I have begun to. What do you think?"

"That you are hipped, most likely! You have been looking pale. Your dress doesn't match your scruples, my dear! Even I think it is just the *leastest* little bit——"

"Well—what?"

"French, Honey! Utterly unlike the usual St. Brides evening garment. For which God be thanked!

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Watch the faces of Roger and Edward when their eyes light upon it. They'll be shocked, but they'll like it. You'll see!"

Pandora seemed gratified.

"I designed it myself!" she said. "One day when I had the blues and I couldn't paint—but, Elizabeth, I don't want to talk about clothes. I want to tell you something—I wonder if you will be dreadfully angry?"

Pandora's voice was anxious and insinuating, her eyes were pleading—half courageous, half timid; her smile was irresistible. Elizabeth watched her with amusement.

"I wonder!" she remarked——

"If I were to let Roger kiss me, what would you think?"

Elizabeth polished, for a moment, more assiduously than ever, and then regarded the result with her head on one side. When she looked at Pandora again her face was more amused than ever.

"*Let!*" she said. "Well, that may mean so many things! It may mean that you let him kiss you good-night. My heart wouldn't beat any quicker over that, certainly. I don't think I am apt to be jealous. Besides, if Roger wants to kiss you, I only make him the more anxious to do it if I forbid it. In fact, I may put my foot down at the letter, but the spirit is beyond my command. And it's the spirit I've always wanted to keep!"

Pandora did not answer. She watched Mrs. Seaton doubtfully, whilst she, Elizabeth, went on polishing.

"Of course, there's quite another meaning to it," she went on placidly. "You may flirt with him, lead him

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on and end by making him so mad for you that you can't very well in decency forbid it."

"No!" interrupted Pandora violently. "I don't really think that was the way of it."

"My dear! Don't distress yourself." Elizabeth stretched out her hand comfortingly, for Pandora's face had gone from red to white, and her eyes were full of tears. "Better tell the truth an' I won't be angry!" she went on. "That's what Aunt Tabitha used to promise me when I was a kid, and then, when the confidence trick worked out—my lord! didn't she spank! You wouldn't think, to look at her now, how hard these little crooked hands of hers used to be!"

Pandora was scarcely listening. She knelt down beside Elizabeth and played with a long string of shiney stones (false, of course) that she (Elizabeth) wore round her neck. She would not meet Elizabeth's eyes.

"It's—it's not fair to tell you," she said. "It wasn't altogether his fault—but I have been miserable ever since. Elizabeth—I do love you! Shall you hate me?"

"I don't expect so!"

"It was all because I was hurt and angry. I was crying."

"What were you hurt and angry about, Dora? Do look me in the face, child! I am not angry. Roger is only human. He never could stand the sight of beauty in distress, and you are one of these diabolically dangerous creatures (luckily rare) whose beauty tears doesn't absolutely annihilate. What made you cry?"

"I—I——" Pandora hesitated, for the true reason of her tears might never be told to Elizabeth. Luckily

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there was another, quite good one, ready to hand. "I believe it was Edward," she complained. "He upset me by refusing, absolutely, to let Mr. Fanshawe come to my studio. He says he won't introduce him either. He called him poisonous, and an outsider."

Elizabeth made a sound expressive of her impatience with Edward. "What does it matter whether he is an outsider or not, or poisonous? We don't want to make a friend of him! Well—we shall just have to manage without Edward, that's all!" she said. "And so that's what made you cry! My dear, let me tell you, you are a goose! However, I am glad you told me—about Roger, I mean—chiefly because I knew it already. That old snake, Mrs. Muir, came whining up to see me to-day with a story of you and Roger on the hill the night before last, and a highly-coloured supplement thrown in of his arm round you and kissing going on. Of course I told her there was not a single word of truth in it, so we had quite a lively interview. She chose to criticize one or two little things about you and me, so I retaliated by telling her about that odious Kate Wilbur, who she is devoted to, picking up my hat on the sand dunes this morning—only, Pandora, the worst of *that* is I found it after all on the top shelf in my wardrobe almost immediately the old cat had gone. Just think of the treachery of Louise selling two, exactly alike, to people in the same town! However, I shall never wear mine again. It may go to a rummage sale."

Elizabeth took up her polisher again. "Why are there so many tiresome people in the world?" she asked pathetically.

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"And—and you weren't angry?" faltered Pandora.

"Angry? Idiot! I was furious—at your stupidity. I do sympathize with the person who invented the Eleventh Commandment—though I know how easy it is to get careless about it! But no, I couldn't have believed Roger would be such an ass. I meant to speak to him about it. 'If you must kiss Pandora, please kiss her privately in the house and not perched up on the top of St. Brides' hill for people's servants to see.' I shan't say anything to him now, however; don't worry. I hate to seem jealous; and, naturally, that's the conclusion he'd leap to, immediately."

"Elizabeth—you needn't—he loves you."

Elizabeth put out her hand. "I know that!" she said curtly. Pandora's assurance was unnecessary, and—oddly enough—she seemed to be more annoyed by it than by the fact that Roger had kissed Pandora. So much for the inconsistencies of human nature!

Pandora got up and walked to the window. "In a few minutes Edward will be here," she said restlessly. "I suppose in a way I must have given him to understand that I'll marry him. Anyway, I haven't exactly said I won't, and he seems to think that's settled it. But I wish I knew: Am I, or am I not engaged to him?"

"My dear idiot, how on earth should I know? If one must be married, I can imagine that Edward would be a good deal less tiresome as a husband than most. For one thing, he is good-tempered. I don't suppose he'd mind if the potatoes weren't done enough, once in a way. He's not the kind to gloom over the income tax or worry over trifles. Then, he is out most of the day.

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What with his six patients and his golf, he is scarcely ever in. Also, he has quite a good housekeeper—a detestable woman, and I should dismiss her first thing, only you could order in another to see about the dinners and household worries for you. In fact, altogether, he is full of advantages besides being quite charming in himself. If one were allowed two husbands, I would choose Edward for my second. Why do you hesitate?"

"Oh, I don't know. I suppose because it is so irrevocable! I know I should wake up the next morning and wish I hadn't—wish I were back in my studio and free again."

"Of course I don't attempt to deny that a married woman has far less time to herself than a single one!" said Elizabeth impartially. "The best of men expects his wife to merge her individuality in his. Man's ideal woman is always the one who is rocking the cradle with one hand and mending the stockings quietly by the fireside with the other. All the same, I should imagine that the happiest marriages are those where the wife disregards the ideal and has a good nurse and a sewing maid."

Pandora turned round sharply. "Elizabeth, by the way you talk, I should never imagine that you care a hang about Roger! Will you tell me something that I want to know frightfully but have never quite dared to ask you?"

"I don't know whether I shall tell you, Honey; but you may as well ask and see!"

"Well—have you ever cared for anyone—a man, of course, more than you do for your own work? Have you ever been absorbed in your life with Roger—or

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any other man—as you are in the lives of the people you make up love stories about? Have you ever loved *anyone* so much that you felt your head going round and round, and black and white got mixed up so that you didn't know the difference, and you would have done any single thing on earth just because he wanted you to?"

Elizabeth gave a little gentle laugh. "If *that's* how you feel at all, you had better get married quick!" she said. "To feel like that is a gift of the gods, Honey, and if you don't grasp the gift with both hands and hold it tight they take back what they've given."

"I know that! They've taken it already. I used to love Edward like that, Elizabeth, but I don't seem able to, now."

"You will again!" comforted Elizabeth. "Edward has a way with him, and he is miles too good for that horrible Kate or for any of the Mackenzie girls. You take him, my dear! I don't believe you'd wake up next day to regret it—or ever at all. Listen! I'll tell you something that I have told no one else. Roger is not the only man I have ever loved. There was once another. His name does not matter. You were a kid at school, so you did not know him. He asked me to marry him, and I would not make up my mind. I told him to go away for a week and when he came back I would give him his answer. Of course, I knew in my heart what the answer would be, but it was fun to me to keep him on tenter-hooks. I had a silly sort of notion that it would make him love me more—well, perhaps it did, only he never came back to tell me so. I can see him yet, the day he went, as plain as I see you

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now. I think he thought it would be all right, for his eyes looked merry and confident.

"He asked me to kiss him, just for luck, before he went, and I wouldn't, for I had an idea in these days that I wouldn't let any man kiss me until I was engaged to him. Right, in the main, no doubt; but you can't put these virtuous maxims into practice without regretting them some time or another.

"He went away fishing for a week and was drowned the day before he should have come back to me—and I have regretted that kiss ever since. Nothing in life will ever make up for it. The dead never disappoint you, Pandora, whatever the living may do, and that is the sole consolation that death brings. I may love Roger just as much, I may love him more. I may be happier with him than I should have been with the other. But I shall never know. . . . There! That's why I want you to think twice before you send Edward away, Honey. I have a feeling you would regret him afterwards."

But Edward did not appear to intend that he should be regretted. He arrived presently, and, to Elizabeth's amusement, seemed to take it for granted that his engagement to Pandora was an accomplished thing.

As for Pandora—she had imagined another passionate love scene in the garden by moonlight after dinner—or supper, or whatever the meal called itself which Elizabeth had planned and Mary had prepared. She had imagined herself yielding, half unwillingly, at last to his entreaties and allowing him to kiss her again.

But, as usual, nothing happened as it was intended.

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There wasn't a moon. They did not wander in the garden afterwards. During supper—only it was dinner with four courses served by 'the girl,' a person whom Mary was in the habit of securing to help in an emergency—Mary appeared with a scared face in the doorway.

"If you please, Miss Elizabeth, ma'am, I can't find the 'Mistress' nowhere!"

"Aunt Tabitha!" exclaimed Elizabeth in alarm. "Why, I had forgotten her very existence!"

"I thought she must have gone to bed for once!" said Roger.

"She's not. She's in the garden!" announced Betty, who was eating velvet cream with earnest enjoyment.

"In the garden! Betty, how could you let her go and not tell? It's a quarter to nine. She'll catch cold. Is she in one of her moods?" chorused Elizabeth and Pandora.

"Oh dear, knows!" replied the child. "I 'vised her not to go. I warned her the bats would flap in her eyes an' that toads would crawl over her feet. But nothing would move her; she's real contrary when she likes, and I've had her on my hands all day!"

"So you have, poor Bettikins! But aren't you sitting up to dinner as a reward?"

Elizabeth rose from the table as she spoke. "No, you needn't come with me, Roger, or Edward, or Pandora. Mary and I can find her perfectly well by ourselves."

She and Mary went out. Elizabeth was wearing her unpaid-for seventeen guinea dress, and Mary took up Pandora's rose scarf as being the only wrap handy, and

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laid it over her shoulders with a muttered "Tut, Miss Elizabeth! you'll catch your death!"

Elizabeth scarcely heard her; she was anxious. It was so altogether unlike Aunt Tabitha to miss a meal that it seemed to her that something must have happened to the old lady; not that she was fond of the poor, crazy old thing—that was impossible, but she was very sorry for her, and she gave her the uncomprehending pity which is nearly always the most the young can feel for the old.

The night was clear and cold and light, with the evening star shining silver over the apple-tree on the lawn. The garden was deserted and very still; Betty's owl hooted above the hollow in the elm-tree, and, now and then, a bat swooped by on noiseless wing.

Elizabeth walked between the rose-bushes calling Aunt Tabitha; and Silas, who was staying at The Knowe with Pandora, imagining it to be a question of cats, rushed on ahead breathing excitedly. Mary, plodding heavily in the rear, muttered to herself.

Suddenly, Elizabeth stopped.

"I hear her!"—she said—"down by the gate. She's singing"—if it could be called singing, the quavering voice, thin and shrill, that issued from the lips of Aunt Tabitha.

Elizabeth shivered. "She gives me the creeps," she said. "Besides, she'll collect a crowd round her if she goes on like this," and she hurried on down the drive.

Presently, as they came round the bend, she stopped short and clutched Mary by the hand. "My Lord!" she whispered. "Why, she has gone clean out of her senses!"

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Indeed it seemed like it.

In the open gateway, Miss Lorrimer was pirouetting about holding her skirt out on each side, with mincing, tripping steps, such as she had learned at the dancing academy in the long-ago days of her youth, and by way of accompaniment she quavered out the air of an old country dance, whilst she curtsied, set to an invisible partner, and turned round like a teetotum.

After the first startled glance, Elizabeth looked beyond her. Opposite the gate a motor car was drawn up on the road, and its sole occupant was a woman who leaned forward in her seat and watched Aunt Tabitha with an expression of terror on her white and horrified face.

"Why—whoever——?"

"It's Mrs. Miles, mem," interrupted Mary in a strange voice.

Mrs. Miles put out her hand with a violent gesture to Mary. "Take her away!" she implored. "I—I can't——" She broke off, as though becoming aware for the first time of Elizabeth's amazed face in the background, and sat back, huddled up in her seat, staring with a sort of horrified fascination at Miss Lorrimer, who still danced and muttered away to herself.

Elizabeth went forward. "Mary, you take her in—you know how to manage her," she said in a quick whisper, "and tell Dr. Rattray to come. I think she is ill—Mrs. Miles, I mean."

"Yes—I'm ill," murmured Mrs. Miles. "Is she going in?"

Aunt Tabitha went away with Mary, quite docile and happy, asking for bread and honey and kissing her

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hand with a silly smile over her shoulder at the disgusted lady in the car.

"Luckily, Dr. Rattray is in the house now," said Elizabeth, "and he will be here in a minute. It is a good thing we thought of coming out to look for my aunt, since you seem to have been so frightened; but, by the way, hadn't you better come in and rest, or something?"

"Oh dear no!—not for worlds! Thanks very much all the same!" said Mrs. Miles, making a great effort to recover her usual calm self-possession. "Your aunt, did you say? She gave me a terrible fright."

"Yes, poor old thing, she's perfectly mad, but wouldn't hurt a fly. Why did you stop and watch her if she frightened you so much?"

"Oh, of course, in the ordinary way I would have rushed past. I was motoring back to Fairview—alone, as you see. I constantly go in and out alone. I like driving myself, and it bores me to have the man sitting there like a block of wood." Mrs. Miles spoke excitedly, her voice shook a little. "Then, all at once, I felt ill," she said. "That's nothing unusual either nowadays, and then I remembered that Edward Rattray was dining here, and I thought I would just stop at the door and ask him to see me home. But just as I was going to turn in at the gate, there she was, standing making faces at me and shaking her fist. Then she began to dance—I don't know when I was so frightened! Perhaps if Edward is not here your husband would see me home. I really feel very ill."

"Oh, they'll both take you if you like," said Elizabeth kindly. "I feel sure you ought to come in and be

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dosed with brandy, or some such horrid thing to pull you round."

"No! Oh no, I couldn't! Hush!" she leaned forward in her seat. "Are they coming? What a shame to take Edward away from—from your sister."

"They'll survive it," remarked Elizabeth drily, and heaved a sigh of relief as Edward's figure appeared round the corner. It amused her to see that Mrs. Miles' eyes travelled beyond him with an anxious, searching gaze.

"She hoped Roger would come too!" thought Elizabeth in her ignorance, with a little smile, half amused, half mocking, at the idea that anyone should be after her own particular Benedict. It did not irritate or annoy her in any way. She found it amusing, and she said good-night to her imaginary rival quite cordially, and even remembered to accept the invitation for Wednesday.

"But if you are not well enough, just 'phone down and let us know!" she said as Edward took the driver's seat, and the car started to glide up the road.

"Oh, but I shall—I shall be all right long before Wednesday!" Mrs. Miles called back; her voice sounded weary and dejected.

Elizabeth felt sorry for her. It must be horrid to be getting old and have no one to care for you, she thought.

"Mind you all come!" were the last words borne back to her as she re-entered the gate.

"Yes—to a man!" she called reassuringly.

Poor Mrs. Miles!

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CHAPTER XIII

THE following Tuesday there was a concert at the Girls' School in St. Brides, and Miss Stevenson, the head-mistress, who thought it high time that Betty's education should begin in earnest, had invited Elizabeth—of whom she secretly disapproved—to come and bring the child with her. Pandora, of whom her disapproval was openly expressed, was not included in the invitation at all.

Pandora loved music; she had a new dress with which to dazzle the adoring eyes of Edward; she knew that, owing to the fact that the news of her engagement had got about, she was the most talked about person in St. Brides at the moment—therefore she meant to accompany Elizabeth and Betty. Moreover, she had a plan in her head, only she did not mean to mention it until she had carried it out. Even Elizabeth sometimes made objections to things.

The concert was to begin at three, and she arrived at The Knowe in time for lunch.

Elizabeth was ready, dressed in a new blue serge coat and skirt and the famous hat which she had not had the heart to wear since the distressing occasion when she had seen its counterpart upon the head of Kate Wilbur.

Betty, who was being taken very much against her

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will, sat looking mutinous in a clean holland dress, and with her dark curls, glossy and smooth, tied with a cherry-coloured ribbon fashionably on one side.

"I had chose to go fishing with Daddy!" she remarked when Pandora entered the room.

"Betty! If you say that one other single time I'll lock you up in a dark cellar with bread and water for a month or more! I really will, so I warn you!" cried Elizabeth. "You don't suppose I *want* to take you—the idea of it bores me stiff, but it is high time someone found out whether you have an ear for music or not. I don't want to go myself, but if the playing is not too loud I am just in hopes that I may be able to think out the end of my story."

"Elizabeth, I am not invited, but I am coming all the same," said Pandora, sitting down and helping herself to cold pie. "Do you suppose it matters? Can they turn me out?"

"Certainly not, Honey. The old frump hates you, of course—probably for being pretty. At the same time she is probably well aware that if she is rude to you, Betty shall never go to her dreadful school. Not that she is going in any case! I always imagine that the girls there have flat feet. That may be only fancy, of course, but I loathe the cloaks they wear too. Altogether, what's to become of the child and her education worries me frightfully—at least it worries Roger, and he worries me. He suggested the school and I put my foot down. Firmly, once and for all, I said I'd rather not have a girl on my hands at all than have one grow up with a taste for hockey and flat feet, and very likely stooping and wearing glasses too. Ghastly

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idea! As for a governess—don't they expect to be treated like one of the family, and have late dinner and be pleasant in the evenings, all sitting together? It makes me miserable to think of it. I'd get no writing done. It's all very well for Roger, comfortably away at sea more than half the time. Besides, as I tell him, Betty is only seven, and the chief thing is for a girl to grow up pretty and with nice manners. And that's one advantage of having you so much about the place, my dear. I'm hoping she'll copy you, and I told him so."

"And what did he say to that?"

"I am sorry to say, Roger thinks a lot of the 'higher education,'" returned Elizabeth evasively. "But about this concert—you can take his ticket, if you like. He won't go. Aunt Tabitha, you are not eating your broth—what's the matter with it?"

"My dear, I prefer clear soup to thick," returned the ancient dame, clasping her mittened hands and looking obstinate. "I have told John so, before. Where is he?"

"She insists upon calling Roger, John. Goodness knows why she should identify him with her fearful past!" Elizabeth told Pandora. Then, turning to Aunt Tabitha, she raised her voice— "He has gone to catch a nice fish for your dinner, dear," she said kindly. "There's something to look forward to! She has never been the same, Dora, since that night she frightened Mrs. Miles at the gate. I believe she is failing."

Pandora did not answer. Her mind had flown back to that night when, for perhaps the space of five minutes, she had been left alone with Roger. They had scarcely spoken. At first Betty had been there,

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but when she had got up and followed Edward out of the house, silence had fallen upon them and a feeling of constraint. She had not dared to look at Roger until, at last, something had compelled her to turn her head and meet his eyes—just for one moment, but he was off his guard, and the memory of what she had read in his eyes then made her heart beat quickly still.

He did not love her—not for a moment did she cheat herself into believing that; but her presence thrilled him and tormented him, and the knowledge filled her with a joyous exultation. Roger had got up from the table and gone out to meet Elizabeth, cursing himself and his own weakness, and Pandora had scarcely seen him since, and never alone.

Whether she had avoided him, or he her, she could not exactly have told. Somehow, it just happened that when she was at The Knowe he was not. If she was in a room, he was out of it. That was all. She had begun by being relieved, and ended by being exasperated at these absences and evasions.

"He'll scarcely catch anything to-day, it's too bright," she remarked. Whether Aunt Tabitha were failing or not did not interest her in the least, so she made no comment upon it.

"Well, what does it matter so long as he is contented and amused? I was glad to see him go, my dear! He has seemed dull lately, and depressed. I hope to heaven he hasn't discovered yet about that bill! And that reminds me, Dora, I've had another beastly note from Brown's. They are not a bit pleased at having to wait any longer for payment. In fact, their note was what I call 'veiled impertinence.' It was typewritten,

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too. I have a good mind never to get another thing in their horrid shop as long as I live!" Elizabeth looked worried and unhappy, but as her eyes fell upon Betty, who was listening eagerly to this enlightening conversation, she recovered herself.

"Good heavens!" she exclaimed, "I wish there were no such things as children in the world! I wish everyone was born grown-up; what a relief it would be! Betty, take Silas into the garden and give him the remains of the pie and a bone, and then we'll start. We'll slip out at the back in case he follows us."

"Darling 'Lizabeth, I'd so much rather stay quietly at home with Silas!" Betty made a last piteous appeal. "He's apt to fret so alone with only Mary and Tabitha, an' I'm nearly sure he's got fleas, so I could *bate* him and keep him off the sofa with his muddy paws. Do, dear, give your consent!"

Silas, waiting for his dinner, gave vent to a whine of passionate entreaty, but Elizabeth laughed inexorably.

"Your Daddy says you run wild," she said, "and that your education is neglected; so there's an end of it. Put on your hat with the cherries round it, and pull up your socks, and mop the tears out of your darling eyes. I'm not really as cross as I sound. Now let's start!"

The large hall of St. Margaret's was filling rapidly. It was not the Concert season, but the fact that a French violinist of some repute was staying in the neighbourhood had offered an opportunity too good to be missed, and he had been engaged to give a recital for the benefit of the pupils.

Pandora and Elizabeth, being fairly early, had seats

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near the front, where Pandora's beauty and her recent engagement, and Elizabeth's reputed oddness made them a target for all eyes. Betty sat next Pandora, and, as soon as the attention of the latter was engaged upon the audience, she brought a small white mouse from her pocket and held it clasped furtively in her hand, thus to relieve the intolerable dullness of her afternoon. Luckily for her, her mother and Pandora sat in blissful ignorance of her proceedings—a gathering of St. Brides people invariably proving more than sufficient to absorb their full attention.

The girls were ranged in benches down the centre of the hall, the little ones in front, the big ones behind—a healthy, happy, out-of-doors looking set, about two hundred in all, and all dressed alike without the least attempt at beautifying or studying individual appearance.

Here and there, a mistress, distressingly suggestive of a female warder, sat at the end of a form. Anybody could have told at a glance that they were accustomed to enforce obedience and to stand upon the letter of the law. Some of them were quite pretty, and might have been attractive during the holidays, but they had "school marm" written all over them.

Elizabeth watched them with pity; Pandora with contempt. They each considered that these women had bartered away their birthright in order to teach a lot of girls what they would presently forget, or would have to unlearn. "Much better teach them the ways of the world!" thought Elizabeth severely, and her eyes strayed to Miss Stevenson, the arch-offender, sitting in state by herself on a chair in the very front.

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"My heavens, God has afflicted her!" she whispered to Pandora. "Wouldn't you shave? And how dare she wear grey with that coloured skin? I shall most certainly never send Betty to a school where the Head is plain. It's a bad example, and her whole outlook might suffer!"

Miss Stevenson, all unaware of these cruel comments, was impelled by the curious attraction which warns people that they are being watched, to turn round suddenly, and catching Elizabeth in the very act, she bowed and smiled to her in her most ingratiating way. She was about to cut Pandora, when she suddenly remembered her engagement just in time to include her in the bow. Not that she liked Pandora any the better for getting engaged to Edward, but engagements led to marriages and marriages to babies, and in a year or two babies were children, whose education was a matter for consideration. So she bowed to Pandora, who, all unconscious of her sudden rise in importance, bowed back with an air of gentle but distant grace that made her look more like a Spanish señorita than ever. So thought Miss Stevenson, who had a vague distrust for people with foreign blood in them—particularly Southern blood, which was so much more passionate and unruly.

"Look at Mrs. Muir!" suddenly exclaimed Elizabeth in a thrilling whisper. "She'll cut me, you'll see, because I all but turned her out of the house the other day for telling me about you and Roger kissing goodnight on the hill. Old cat! However, if she does, I don't care!"

However, she didn't. Whatever her reason for keep-

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ing friendly with Mrs. Seaton might be she was evidently determined to take no snubs, for she settled herself in the chair immediately in front of Betty and turned round and embraced them all in a toothy grin.

"My dear Elizabeth!" The absence of a front tooth converted her whispering into a most dangerous sounding hiss. "I was hoping to see you here—and Pandora! Prettier than ever, but aren't you cold with so little on your chest, my dear? You are the talk of the town just at present, as no doubt you know!"

At this ambiguous speech Pandora went scarlet, and Elizabeth, imprudent as ever, exclaimed:

"There are plenty of fools in St. Brides with no more to do than to lap up tea in each other's drawing-rooms and talk scandal. But I suppose it is her engagement to Edward Rattray this time that's shaking society to its foundations!"

"People aren't quite such fools as you take them to be, Elizabeth," retorted Mrs. Muir, very red and flustered. "You expect your actions and Pandora's to escape comment and be above criticism, and that whilst you are very often acting—both of you—in a most extraordinary manner quite unlike other people. You call yourselves unconventional. I call you unreasonable!" And Mrs. Muir drew her feather boa tightly round her neck and sat back in her chair feeling that she had scored one.

But one could never feel like that for long with Elizabeth, and now, apparently unaware that Mrs. Muir had scored at all, she merely replied peaceably:

"I daresay you are right. I daresay I am unreasonable. Roger says the same. But one can never be

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quite certain how one is going to take a thing, or if it will affect one in the same way twice. No wonder people say women shouldn't have votes, though I do think myself——"

"Elizabeth, look!" suddenly Pandora broke in on Mrs. Muir's look of utter bewilderment. "There's Mr. Fanshawe with the Mackenzie crowd. Isn't he utterly—well, repellant?"

Elizabeth looked. She saw a little, middle-aged man, dry and lean, with a touch of the Jew about his large, well-shaped nose and dark, melancholy, yet sinister eyes. Mrs. Mackenzie, who headed the procession of which he was at the rear, was evidently bursting with gratification.

Edward might have slipped through her fingers, but Mr. Fanshawe, who was probably on the bright side of sixty, was unmarried and very rich, and might still be persuaded to take unto himself a wife from the daughters of the house of Mackenzie.

"She wants him to sit by her," Elizabeth whispered back, "'cos she's got Myra and 'Little Emily' with her. But he won't!"

He didn't. With some dexterity, he disentangled himself from the trio, and presently took the outside seat in the row behind Pandora—which position commanded quite an excellent view of her pale profile.

Elizabeth smiled. "If only Edward wasn't so obstinate," she began.

"*Hush!*" said Pandora in quite a different voice. "They are going to begin. They are going to play the César Franck Sonata. This man, Elizabeth, is very good. I have heard him before, in Paris."

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Elizabeth yawned. Whether he was good or bad made not the slightest difference to her. But she liked to watch his face; he had dark eyes and rather long dark hair; he looked romantic and dreamy and spirited, and as if he had a dash of the devil in him. Altogether a charming combination which could only be found in a foreigner, so she decided.

The pianist was the lady who taught music at the school. She appeared nervous and somewhat overwhelmed by the honour that was being accorded her.

They began. The room was wrapped in silence save for the exquisite notes that opened the first movement.

The violinist's playing was clear and strong and tender, with a touch of genius to make him kin to the great ones, living and dead, of his art. Miss Young played her part with intelligence and sympathy, which was the utmost to be expected of her.

Pandora listened in an ecstasy. It didn't seem as if there were any troubles left in the world, or difficulties, or doubts—only a great radiant happiness wrapped in the enchanting sounds. She had not the slightest idea of it, but tears rolled down her cheeks. Triumph filled her soul, and ecstasy—the triumph and swiftness of victory, the mystery of genius was revealed to her, and the secret of life.

Elizabeth, on her right hand, found the music a pleasant accompaniment to her thoughts. The ending of chapter xxvi., which had kept her awake last night, became clear to her. She thought of one or two amusing things to make her heroine say. This matter settled, her eyes wandered round the room. She thought how tiresomely uniform were the rows and rows of

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girls with their smooth heads, their unruffled bows, their calm eyes, their unbecoming garments and their flat feet. No, never, never should Betty enter their school to be made one of them on a like pattern. Rather should she grow up ignorant, with a shapely foot and a working knowledge of a becoming way to dress. She looked across Pandora at her child and smiled at her affectionately.

Betty did not see the look; she sat very, very still, intent upon something, with her head bent over her clasped hands.

"What's she holding?" thought Elizabeth, but the unanswered question did not worry her. She felt a little glow of maternal pride for Betty in her cherry-trimmed hat, sitting so still and so good without fidgeting.

Fresh from the contemplation of Betty, her eyes fell—obliquely—upon Mr. Fanshawe, who was watching Pandora intently through half-closed eyes. The thought flashed through her mind that he was very like a vulture that she had seen once in the Zoo. If Edward had his reasons for not wishing Pandora to know him, without a doubt they were good reasons and to be respected. At this reflection, which almost amounted to a renunciation, Elizabeth heaved a sigh.

The first two movements came to an end, and there was a burst of applause, in which she joined heartily, under the impression that she had enjoyed them thoroughly.

Mrs. Muir leaned back in her chair and, turning her head, hissed over her shoulder: "How glad I should be of a cup of tea now!"

Pandora, thus rudely brought back to the common-

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place, gave her a glance of annihilating contempt, which, however, Mrs. Muir, secure in her armour of self-satisfaction and stupidity, and aided by short-sightedness, did not see.

"It is the Recitative now," Pandora found herself saying aloud. "Oh, why can't everyone keep quiet!"

The violinist settled his violin under his chin, he raised his bow—paused, held it suspended. A shriek rang through the hall—another, and another.

Mrs. Muir sprang to her feet, shaking herself like a terrier, tugging at her skirts with both hands, shuddering all over as if she were in some new kind of death agony.

At the same instant Betty sank unostentatiously upon the floor on her hands and knees.

Everyone turned in their seats or sprang up, craning to see what was the cause of the disturbance. Someone shouted out "What is it? Is there a fire?" at which several children began to cry, and some tried to crush out of their seats towards the door; for one horrid moment there was danger of panic amongst them, then a man's voice from the back called out authoritatively:

"Sit down, every one of you! There's not a thing the matter."

The violinist, meanwhile, stood on the platform, quite still, watching the tumult beneath him with an air of bewildered amazement not unmixed with contempt.

Mrs. Muir remained the centre of interest, and continued with a convulsed face to chatter and shake herself, whilst her voice rose in a gasping cry: "It's up my leg! Ah! help me to get it down! Help me!"

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"My Lord!" exclaimed Elizabeth, "is she mad?" Her eyes fell upon Betty crouched upon the floor—a terrible idea assailed her, beneath the horror of which she reeled back into her chair. Could she have done it, she would have lain her hand over the child's mouth to keep back the words which only too surely she knew were coming. But already it was too late. They rang out, clear and shrill, to be heard by all who had ears to hear:

"Nothin' to be afraid of—it's only Fred'rick! He's run up into Mrs. Muir's *cloves*. I *fink* I could coax him down again!"

"Pandora! smother her! kill her!" commanded Elizabeth in a fierce whisper. "Oh, why did I live to have a child?"

Meanwhile, the panic past, the orderly, uniform pupils, in spite of agitated commands from the mistresses on guard, had sprung upon chairs, even upon the backs of forms, the better to enjoy the agony of Mrs. Muir and the guilt of Betty. Heads were turned; the room was full of whispering and laughter. Who was "Frederick"? was the burning question that passed from lip to lip. César Franck was forgotten; his sonata no longer existed for that amused, whispering audience. The finest passage in the work rendered by a heaven-inspired genius could no longer have held or claimed its attention.

The violinist saw it all, and his scorn deepened; not another note of that divine work would he cast like pearls before this audience of swine. Quietly he closed his music. "What you call '*tripe*' I play here," he said to himself with a smile.

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And, meanwhile, in the midst of the tumult, a small white mouse crept down from the ambush of Mrs. Muir's petticoats and made good his escape. With a dash he secured freedom and vanished for ever from mortal ken.

Miss Stevenson led Mrs. Muir, hysterical and half fainting, from the hall, and with great difficulty silence was enjoined, and the girls prevailed upon to believe that the excitement was at an end, and to resume their seats.

But Mrs. Muir was not the only one to go out. With a heart bursting with disappointment and rage, Pandora pushed past Betty. "You little *devil!*" she said chokingly. Elizabeth tried to stop her, but she could not have answered her, much less have stayed there without bursting into tears. She wanted nothing now but to be alone. To hear more music, in that room full of idiots ready to be amused and distracted by a mouse, would have given her no joy any more—only pain. The bubble had burst, the rainbow melted. It was only a commonplace everyday world after all, peopled by unimaginative idiots, blind and deaf and dumb to all that made life glorious and beautiful.

She let herself into her flat with her latch key. Luckily it was empty, for she had sent her maid home in the morning and given her a holiday. The girl had left a ring on the gas stove in the kitchen alight, and upon it a kettle had been steaming and hissing and boiling over for goodness only knew how long. Through the open door, Pandora saw and heard it, but she was past caring for a little thing like that.

She went into her sitting-room, knocked over the easel upon which stood "the composite portrait," as

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Edward called her Carmen, cast herself down upon the purple couch and wept bitterly.

After a time it penetrated to her understanding that the electric bell of the front door was ringing, and that it had been doing so, at intervals, for the last few minutes. Her first idea was to let it ring, but the sound of it began to get on her nerves. Besides, she reflected, it might be a telegram, or Elizabeth, or the milk-girl, and any of these might keep on ringing for quite a time before they grew tired of it and went away.

So she rose up from the purple cushions, powdered her nose, dabbed at her eyes, and went to the front door and flung it open, an impatient exclamation upon her lips. But this changed to a gasp of astonishment, and she drew back, staring, for once surprised out of her usual calm and self-control.

Mr. Fanshawe stood upon the doorstep, hat in hand.

"May I come in?" he asked in a smooth voice. He had a queer, twisting smile that sent one of his eyebrows up in a triangle.

Pandora, utterly taken aback, did not know how to refuse him; she stood holding open the door, looking extraordinarily pretty and very much confused.

"I—I—didn't expect you to come," she stammered out.

"No! Didn't you?"

He stepped into the hall and laid down his hat on the oak chair, which was its sole article of furniture. Pandora had picked it up for next to nothing at a second-hand shop, and was very proud of it, unaware of the fact that it was no more antique than her kitchen table.

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"I had your message," he remarked, "from Mr. Scott, the dealer in Bell Street."

"Oh—did you?" Pandora murmured confusedly. "I didn't think—I am afraid——" she paused, dreadfully uncomfortable.

Although she had gone deliberately enough to work to bring this visit about, she had not been prepared for Mr. Fanshawe to come so soon. She had expected some warning—thought, perhaps, that Elizabeth might have been there. But everything had come about unexpectedly, and Pandora, who was very seldom daunted by circumstances, was horribly conscious all at once that she was afraid of this little, dried-up looking man, with his dark, sinister eyes and deadly polite smile. Besides, there was Edward—he would be furious. Of course she knew, and had always acted on the assumption, that she had a perfect right to do exactly as she liked without reference to Edward or his wishes, still she shrank from the idea of his getting to know of this visit which she had brought to pass in direct opposition to his will. Perhaps it was because she was feeling depressed and nervous at the moment, but as she shut the front door and allowed Mr. Fanshawe to enter her flat, she was filled with the horrible and sure conviction that his coming would bring to her and Elizabeth no good, but only evil. However, it was too late for misgivings. Mr. Fanshawe, with the air of being perfectly at home, walked in at the open door of the studio, where he stood, for a moment, looking round him, still with the queer smile on his lips. He turned suddenly, as Pandora followed him. "So! you didn't think, my dear young lady!" he exclaimed, "and you are afraid!

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Now let us be perfectly frank with each other, and then we can get to business!"

"I am always perfectly frank!" returned Pandora haughtily, and recovering her self-possession with an effort.

He still smiled, and his eyes had a mocking look in them that made her perfectly furious. "What a delightful quality!" he remarked. "But did you really bring yourself to believe, even for one moment, that I would neglect the er—*invitation* you left for me with Scott? Well—you won't mind my saying so, will you? —you dear ladies and your tactics have always afforded me amusement. You don't mind putting a match to a haystack, do you? But, oh dear, how surprised you all are when it burns!"

Pandora flushed. She was perfectly aware that she ought to have known that this was bound to happen. Not only had she gone to Scott's yesterday and told him that he might tell Mr. Fanshawe next time he looked in that her pictures were for sale, but she had also been very much aware for some time back of the looks of open admiration which Mr. Fanshawe had never failed to cast upon her at every opportunity.

"I—I thought, of course, that you would write first," she said, "and then I could have got Elizabeth—that is Mrs. Seaton—to come along and chaperon me——"

He made an expressive and foreign gesture. "My dear Miss——"

"My name is Pandora. I can claim no other," she said proudly.

"Miss Pandora, surely you must be perfectly well aware that the way you looked at me in the concert hall

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just now was an invitation in itself? The very way you left—you touched me with your hand as you went out—conveyed a signal to me to follow you——"

"Mon Dieu! Herr Jesus!" ejaculated Pandora very softly. She sank down upon the purple cushions in the window and began to laugh.

A dull red spread over Mr. Fanshawe's face. He bit his lip, and stood looking down on her with darkening brow. Somehow, his anger and his awkwardness appeased her; she felt more at ease with him and less unfriendly. He was only a man after all, and therefore to be played with and tormented. She went on laughing——

"I really don't see what's amusing you," he said at last.

"Don't you?" Pandora wiped her eyes. "Now you are here, you may as well sit down," she said, becoming more gracious as she recovered her self-possession. "I laughed because I am angry with you; it is all so funny. I—well, I did look at you when you first came in. I admit it. But then, you always stare at me so—well, pointedly, that it is difficult to help looking back. As for *touching* you when I went out—why, I wasn't even conscious of you, or of anyone! I was perfectly mad, *furious*, and beside myself. A concert spoilt because of a mouse! I could wring Betty's neck now, when I think of it!"

"So that was why you came out!" he said softly to himself. "What fools women make of men, even when they don't intend it! And I took it for a signal to me that you had managed to escape your people, and that it was our opportunity!"

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"Good gracious!" ejaculated Pandora, "you little know Elizabeth! I never need to 'escape' from her. She understands and sympathizes with everything. Of course she would have preferred to be here with me now, because people *will* talk. As it is, they have got their knife into me over one or two little things already, and, you'll see, *someone* will have seen you come in here."

Fanshawe had already thought this not improbable, but the idea had not disturbed him. For one thing, it hadn't struck him that the reputation of Miss Pandora called for special consideration. For another, he had been a gay dog in his day, and the trouble with him was that the day was over. Few things would have given him greater satisfaction than that this beautiful girl should be talked about in connection with himself. So he merely said with his queer, twisted smile:

"Surely, you don't mind a little ill-natured gossip?"

"Oh, I am too used to it to mind it particularly," returned Pandora frankly. "But I can't say the same for Captain Seaton or—or Edward Rattray," she added with something of an effort.

"Is it true that you are engaged to Rattray?" As Mr. Fanshawe asked the question, the pupils of his eyes contracted in a strange way.

"Perfectly true!"

He watched her narrowly, a slight contemptuous smile on his lips. "Another instance of the attraction of the flesh rather than the spirit," he said. "You—and your talent; and that boy—and his golf! Think better of it!"

"Thinking only brings me 'out at the same door as in

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I went,'" quoted Pandora. Something in the man's face made her uncomfortable. She hoped to goodness that Edward would never come to hear of this. "We seem to be forgetting," she said, "that you came here on business—to see my pictures. Shall we begin?"

He gave a little, half-mocking bow. "As you please, Miss Pandora!" he said, and stooping, picked up the fallen easel. "What's this?" he asked.

"That? Oh, you won't care for that. Nobody does—but it is a portrait from memory of De Lussan as Carmen."

His eyebrow cocked up, and he looked with a cynical expression from the portrait to the face of the girl beside him.

"Um—yes! Painted before your looking-glass, I should say! Where did you learn to draw, my dear?"

"I learned in Paris—at Rémy's studio."

"Well, what the devil—I beg your pardon, but this arm—it looks as if it had been broken above the elbow and set by a medical student in his first year. You remember Sargent's picture of a Spanish dancer?"

"Yes."

"I thought so! Remember the work of the masters if you like, only don't let it be too apparent in your own work that you do!"

"You mean that mine is not original!" said Pandora, deeply mortified.

"My dear child, your work is an extraordinary mixture of the commonplace and the startling. It certainly has its splashes of originality. That blue-background now, pleases me—yet worked in, just so, where have I seen it before? Your sense of colour is better than your

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drawing, however. Zélie's nose isn't like that. Wherever you have bones, you cover them up with too much flesh to hide the bad drawing," he added smoothly. "What's this here?"

"That's the bridge crossing the Eden."

Fanshawe took out an eyeglass, polished it well, stuck it in his left eye and regarded the work in question with a look of pained displeasure. "Pretty!" he said at last in a dry voice, "but *you* ought to know better than to paint anything so futile as the bridge across the Eden. Leave that sort of thing to the pupils at St. Margaret's. Are these sheep?"

"No; they are stones by the river-side," answered Pandora, scarlet with mortification, and snatching up the offending sketch she tore it across and flung it into a corner of the room—to which diverting exhibition of temper Mr. Fanshawe accorded a smile of cynical amusement and proceeded to walk round the room.

At some of the things he scarcely glanced, and if Pandora had not been so angry and mortified she would have trembled for the £30. As it was, her one desire was for him to go. But Fanshawe apparently had no intention of going. Before one or two things he paused to raise an eyebrow, but whether in approval or disdain she could not have told. He came to a full stop, however, all at once, before a hastily done sketch of a woman lying back in a deep chair, with cushions piled round her, and with a faint, ironical smile on her thin lips. He checked an ejaculation of surprise, and remained staring and silent with it in his hand for quite a minute before he said:

"She seems familiar to me——"

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"Yes, no doubt," returned Pandora. "It's Mrs. Miles; probably you know her. I met her out at tea the other day, and she looked like that, so I sketched her afterwards from memory. What do you think of it?" she added eagerly, for she thought herself it was rather good.

Perhaps Fanshawe thought so too, for he put it down hastily and turned away. "Oh, painfully like," he said with a little shiver. "She's a client of mine," he added, "and she often comes to my office and worries me about business of which she knows nothing at all!" And he gave his shoulders a slight shrug, as if to dismiss the burden of Mrs. Miles from his thoughts. "What is this?" he asked, and paused before a large painting in oils. It represented the naked figure of a girl asleep in a field of poppies. Her face was hidden—a dark tress of hair—dark as Pandora's own—lay across the breast. The body, long and slender and fine, was half hidden by the scarlet flowers and the long grass. Fanshawe smiled, a sardonic, secret smile, because he was sure that the body, suggested as much as revealed, represented the body of Pandora, just as the Carmen represented her face.

The picture was good, though some of its faults were glaring enough, and he looked at it long and musingly.

Pandora's heart swelled with pride. Here, at last, was something that this merciless critic could praise. But he passed on from it without a word to a little easel covered by a sheet of thin white paper.

"And this?"

"That's nothing—a mere sketch," she said hurriedly.

For answer, he coolly removed the paper and revealed

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the charcoal sketch of a man's head—dark eyes looking out from beneath straight and sombre brows, a blunt nose, a mouth of strong passions and a strong will, the lips just parted in a half-smile that gave the face its expression of sweetness and saved it from ugliness outright.

"By the Lord, that's *good!*" exclaimed Fanshawe with involuntary admiration. "But you didn't do it—what?"

"Yes, I did—of course. Why not?"

"Only because it is considerably better than the rest. I know the face, too—who is it?"

"It is Captain Seaton."

"Ah!" Fanshawe's eyes dwelt on Pandora's flushed face. "Well, I'll buy it!"

"No, you won't. It's not for sale. He doesn't even know I have done it. You may have any of the others that you like, but not this."

He put back Roger's portrait. "If you have done one of Rattray show it to me!" he said abruptly.

"There he is, over there in the corner!"

He gave it one glance. "Useless!" he commented, turning his back upon it. "A photograph of the Early Victorian era could not have damned him more mercilessly. You have simply sketched a 'knut,' my dear girl, and one of the most unintelligent description. Now that's unfair to Rattray, for he is not altogether unintelligent, and his face is individual if it's nothing else. Think of its crookedness—of the pose of his head—full of character; but you have failed to interpret it. I wonder what you would make of me?"

"You! I wouldn't do you for the world!"

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"Not even for suitable remuneration? Come! I'll pay you well for a charcoal sketch of my head such as that you have done of Seaton!"

"I don't want to do you. I'd hate to. I couldn't. You may have any of my pictures that you like!"

"I don't like any of them!" he answered coolly. "The suggestion of yourself, my dear Miss Pandora, lying amongst the poppies has its points, I'll admit. I'll give you £5 for it."

"£5!" echoed Pandora in deep disappointment. "£5! Is that all?"

"It's certainly not worth more."

"Besides——" she hesitated uncomfortably.

"Well, it's scarcely the picture that you would care to admit to Rattray that you had sold to me? Is that it?"

It was, though she hardly knew how to admit it. However, he only gave a little, dry laugh.

"Well, never mind!" he said, "keep the picture to hang in his dressing-room over the way when you are married! I don't want it, and £5, I can see, is no use to you—what?"

"Not a bit!"

He came a step nearer, looking at her keenly with an expression in his sinister dark eyes that made her shudder. "You have got into some scrape," he said, "and need money. How much do you need?"

She regarded him with mingled feelings of uncertainty and distrust which were increased rather than lessened by the conviction that he was ready to give her the money for the asking, and that in letting her sketch him he would consider that he was doing her a

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favour for which he was getting no adequate return. She walked to the window and looked out into the sunny street; Mrs. Wilbur and her daughter (she of the purple hat) were sauntering by on the opposite side, in the hope, no doubt, that Edward would come out and join them. With what delight they would have hailed the news that close at hand "that dreadful Pandora person" was entertaining alone, and unchaperoned, the dangerous Mr. Fanshawe. Dangerous! —yes, that was what people called him in St. Brides.

Pandora, with a glance back over her shoulder at him could not but wonder why. Not on account of his fascinations, anyway, she decided, for they simply did not exist—a little dried-up withered man getting on for sixty. It was absurd to think of him as a person to be feared—so she told herself—unaware that there may be more reasons than one for fearing a man of Fanshawe's type. All the same, something kept her there hesitating, a silly feeling that in some way a momentous decision lay before her—even that her fate hung in the balance. The notion worried her.

"I don't want to draw you a bit!" she said weakly. "And I don't see why you want me to. You don't really like my work, so you ought to go away now and think no more about it. I don't know why you don't——"

"Because I happen to rather like your charcoal work, my dear—that's why. And because—well, perhaps I like to help Beauty in distress, once in a way. Why not? Come, a couple of sittings, at most, and the money is yours!"

Yes—the money would be hers, or rather it would

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be Elizabeth's. Elizabeth would be free of this haunting worry of debt, and that was the chief thing after all.

Of course Edward would disapprove, would probably be very angry—but then, did it matter? The prospect of Edward's wrath left her unmoved. It ought to have restrained her, but, on the contrary, it steadied her already formed resolution, and she turned round and said rather unwillingly:

"All right, I'll do you! But I shall want £30 for it."

He raised his eyebrows at the sum, but made no objection to it. He had gained his point, and if he felt any elation or pleasure in it he managed to disguise it very effectually, and only said in a matter-of-fact tone:

"When may I come?"

"Oh—to-morrow. When you like—what does it matter?"

Mr. Fanshawe took out his pocket-book and consulted it before replying. "Unluckily I am engaged to-morrow," he said. "Busy all morning, and in the afternoon an 'at home' I promised to attend. Horrible bore! Shall we say Thursday?"

"If you like."

"At three o'clock?—four o'clock?"

"Why not in the morning? I always work in the morning——"

"The morning would suit me admirably, Miss Pandora, but for the unfortunate circumstance that I, too, always work at that time. At half-past two in the afternoon I might just manage. However, if it is an inconvenient hour for you——"

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"It isn't. We'll say half-past two on Thursday; I shan't finish you in one day, I am afraid."

"I don't find that a cause for regret," returned Mr. Fanshawe, undisturbed by the evident fact that Pandora did so find it. "And now, one more point"—he took a cheque-book from his pocket—"I take it you have no objection to being paid in advance?"

"Oh—but——" Pandora stammered.

"Yes—it's quite the same to me. More satisfactory, in fact," he added, with his sinister little smile. He walked to the writing table, and after a short search he found a pen that would write—Pandora watched him with a smile of gratification, thinking with joy of what Elizabeth would say.

But as to what Edward would say, she did not give another thought.

Fanshawe handed her the cheque and took his departure, and Elizabeth would have thought that he looked more like a vulture than ever could she have seen his face as he walked down the stairs, and out into the street.

Before he had gone very far he met an acquaintance who stopped him with an exclamation. "Halloa, Fanshawe," he said. "You look as if you had some joke of which you alone could see the point!"

"And so I have!" retorted Fanshawe with a chuckle. "A dashed fine joke, but I am not going to share it with you or anyone! Ta! Ta!"

"Beast of a man that," mused the other as he went on his way.

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CHAPTER XIV

MEANWHILE Pandora was left rejoicing, though somewhat downcast by the low estimate in which Fanshawe held her pictures.

Luckily she soon found herself able to disagree with him, and, not only that, but able to persuade herself that he did not really despise her work at all. If he had not liked it, he would not have paid her £30 to do a portrait of himself. "He doesn't belong to a Charity Organization Fund—not much!" she said to herself, as she pinned the cheque on to the wall, just beneath the portrait of Edward, in order not to forget it when she went out. Then, in the happiest frame of mind, she discovered that she was hungry. No wonder, for it was past five o'clock. She rang the bell—not that this was at all necessary; for to summon Marianna from the kitchen she only had to raise her voice, for the maid had a pleasing habit of always keeping the kitchen door open.

However, the bell was a brass one, and had been bought in Seville, so she had an affection for it and always used it on the slightest provocation. There was no answer, and she presently remembered that she had sent Marianna home that day.

"And I never *can* remember where she keeps the tea caddy!" mourned Pandora. A thorough search in the

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pantry brought to light the leg of a boiled rabbit, half a cucumber, a glass of Bovril, and two stale cookies—of which weird meal she partook without much enthusiasm, seated upon the edge of the couch in the studio, and gazing the while at the portrait of the girl amongst the poppies. "Suppose anatomy *is* my weak point!" she admitted to herself after a prolonged inspection, "though nowadays, what with cubists and futurists and impressionists, I really can't see that it matters! Anyway, the poppies cover up the doubtful bits!"

Having finished the question to her own satisfaction she finished the Bovril and altered the nose of De Lussan, considered the idea of painting tiger lilies in the background, and altogether worked steadily until the light became too damnable for anything. Then she removed her purple overall, pinned on a new Watteau hat, which was extremely becoming and utterly unsuitable for the country roads, and went out.

The idea of looking in on Edward to show herself to him when she was looking very nearly her best occurred to her. Besides, it was only fair to tell him about Fanshawe, and she was not unaware of the fact that it would be a good deal better to tell him herself rather than leave it to chance.

So she crossed the street and rang his bell. After a minute Mrs. Smiley appeared, looking as disapproving as ever and obviously pleased that she was able to say that Mr. Edward was out. She thought he might have gone to see a patient, but she could not say for sure. And she could not say what time he would be in either. Would Miss Pandora care to leave a message? She had become quite civil since she had learned

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of the engagement, but hers was the sort of civility that prudence uses to cloak suspicion and dislike.

But Pandora had no message; she was relieved rather than disappointed to find that he was out. If she had seen him it would have delayed her getting to The Knowe, and she was all anxiety to see Elizabeth and give her the good news.

So she hurried on up the road. She found Betty sitting on the gate guarding it against would-be callers with her little pea-shooter. But she seemed to have less heart for the warfare than usual, and her expression was dejected and listless. When she saw Pandora, however, her face brightened; she gave a whoop of joy and slid to the ground—at least she tried to slide, and partially succeeded when her petticoats caught on the post and she was brought up short, suspended in mid-air.

Pandora rescued her and set her upon the ground.

"Thanks, dear; it's always happening," said the child in a little melancholy voice, "and last time, there I had to wriggle till the milk-girl came 'long, and she's a most impertinent girl!"

Pandora saw that she had been crying till her eyes had sunk pathetically behind swollen eyelids and cheeks: "What *on earth's* the matter?" she asked.

"I'm a most unlucky child!" Betty gave a little gulp and squeezed Pandora's hand tighter. "Not only Fred'rick's lost——"

"Frederick?"

"My mouse, dear. Him Daddy bought me from a *perticerally* nice sailor-man at the Docks, who keeps a bit of a shark pickled on his mantelpiece. You see, I

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didn't a bit care for the doll, so he bought me this mouse to make up."

"Oh!" returned Pandora sternly. "Well, if he is lost it serves you right, and I, for one, am glad. Do you realize what a naughty child you are? It depresses me to think any child could be so naughty. Do you suppose that ever in this world before, a concert has been disturbed by a mouse?"

"Yes; but he was the *dearest* mouse!" quavered Betty, by no means sure how much in earnest her dear Dora really was. "So gentle, he wouldn't have bitten —not unless you cornered him and he had to turn. I never meant him to get away at all, but I trusted him. I opened my hand the wee-est bit too much, and he gave a bound and was off! So affectionate, he was! Not a common mouse at all! He'd eat out of my hand!" And at the thought of all the endearing qualities of the departed Frederick, two tears rolled down Betty's cheeks, and finally splashed on to her holland overall.

"Come, don't cry!" said Pandora offering the cold comfort of superior age and wisdom. "When you get older you'll find lots of things more important to cry about than a white mouse! If you are really set upon him I'll give you another!"

Betty wiped her eyes and squeezed Pandora's hand gratefully. "Thank you, darling! If I am to have another, might it be a squirrel instead? They are really more satisfactory, and I've got about nineteen nuts saved up already in case of getting one for my next birfday or Christmas."

"Well, I'll see," said Pandora. "I don't believe in keeping wild animals in captivity, it's cruel."

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"Pandora—*what's* captivity?"

"You ask too many questions, child. It's a bad habit. If you don't look out, I shall give you a dictionary instead of a squirrel."

"Please not, Dora. Books is such dull things. I can't seem to get interested in them. . . . I wasn't only crying about poor Frederick. Mummy said I had 'graced her, and she wondered why I was born——"

"Rubbish, dear. She may have said you *dis*graced her. So you had. It was quite enough to try the patience of an archangel. You were born because she and Daddy wanted you, so cheer up and don't try on the Misunderstood as if you were a child out of a Sunday-School story-book; the rôle is both unbecoming and boring, and now——" she broke off hastily, seeing the questions literally trembling upon Betty's lips—"where is Elizabeth?"

"Writing. That's why I was pea-shooting at the gate—to get into her good books again. She likes me to keep people from bothering round. And that 'minds me; I do hope you won't object, Dora, but Silas has gone off on his own with Daddy."

"Where is—Daddy?"

"Oh, goodness knows where, dear!" The child gave a little sigh, and pressed her hot forehead against Pandora's cool hand. "My head does ache something wicked," she said; "and when Daddy hears about Frederick I expect he'll scold too——"

"No, he won't. The deed's done now; Frederick has gone, and the concert is over. You have been punished enough, and Daddy won't rub it in. It is women who

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go in for the refinement of cruelty, not men, my dear! I blame Elizabeth for taking you——"

"Don't blame Elizabeth; she did it for the best. But I don't think I shall ever care much about music, now!"

They entered the house together. Betty wore a look of chastened regret. "Do you suppose I might just slip up to bed?" she whispered. "It's been a trying day, and I don't feel inclined for supper. It's cold beef."

"Yes, dear. Slip up! Don't forget to brush your teeth; and I'll bring you a slice of cake and a cup of tea when you are snug in bed. That'll be nicer than beef, won't it?"

The little girl seized Pandora's hand and kissed it in a passion of gratitude, then leaving her went slowly up the stairs.

Pandora, feeling pleasantly virtuous, went into the study. Aunt Tabitha was sitting by the fireplace with a tray of beads on her lap, from which she was sorting out all the blue ones to string together.

Elizabeth raised a white, distracted face from her writing. "What the dickens is it now?" she began, and broke off with an air of relief when her eyes fell upon Pandora.

"I thought you must be Mary," she explained. "She has been worrying me off and on about supper till I am nearly demented. What if it *is* ready; who cares? Roger is at the Club. I sent him to dine there just on purpose so that I could write undisturbed by meals."

Pandora went up to her quickly. "I've got the very best news possible! Put your writing away! Come and eat, drink and be merry, for to-morrow we don't

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die but we pay our bills! Is there any champagne in the house, I wonder?"

Perhaps her gaiety was just a little exaggerated, for in her heart of hearts she was not perfectly easy about her dealings with Mr. Fanshawe. Even the easy-going Elizabeth might be disinterested enough to draw the line here on Edward's behalf, if for no other reason.

Meanwhile she was gazing at Pandora in amazement.

"My dearest girl, have you by any chance gone mad?" she enquired mildly.

"No! But I have got the £30! Yes, actually! Oh, let us be joyful!" and Pandora, setting the example in hilarity, began to dance round the room, Silas (who had evidently returned from the Club, where dogs were not received with enthusiasm) joining in, barking and making short springs in the air round her. Round and round they went till Pandora, quite giddy, made a lurch and put out her hand to steady herself. In doing so she knocked against Aunt Tabitha, who at the moment was holding out a small box of the sorted blue beads.

It fell from her outstretched hand, and the beads rolled all over the floor.

"Oh—I am sor——" began Pandora, and stopped short absolutely thunderstruck, for Aunt Tabitha sprang, shaking and quivering with passion, to her feet, and tottered a step or two towards her, leaning on her ebony cane. Her eyes, usually alight with a mild and silly smile, were now transfigured with rage; her head shook feebly, and a torrent of horrible language poured from her withered lips. "You—bastard!" she called in a hideous, cracked shriek. "From the gutter

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I took you and nursed you, and pampered you, and now you serve me this trick—you with your white face and lying eyes. You would take my John from me. Yes, I've watched you and spied on you and listened to you behind doors, and I've read your wicked thoughts. Like your mother—let her burn in hell!" Her voice rose to a scream, and she fell forward on her knees on the floor, clutching around her for the beads that lay scattered.

Elizabeth remained sitting, petrified and white with horror.

Pandora was white too; she stared at Aunt Tabitha in a dazed way. She felt stunned and, all at once, rather sick and faint. "What does she mean?" she whispered—"about my mother?"

"She's mad, dear!" whispered Elizabeth.

They both spoke in hushed tones lest the dreadful old woman should hear them and begin again. It seemed a blessed respite that she should pick up her beads and clutch them and kiss them and murmur incoherent babblings over them.

Very cautiously and quietly Elizabeth skirted her way to the fireplace and rang the bell.

"We'll get Mary," she said, "she's the only one who can manage her. You go out of the room, Honey! Wait for me in the dining-room."

Pandora obeyed thankfully. She had a horror of disagreeable scenes. She had always more or less disliked Aunt Tabitha, often laughed at her, but never dreamed that behind the silly, vacant smile lurked the vindictive cunning of an evil nature that might well provoke fear by its utter lack of restraint and uncon-

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trolled abandonment. She had had a rude shock. She stood by the window and stopped her ears with her fingers lest she should hear that shrill, dreadful voice again.

But all was silent. She was dimly aware of a shuffling on the stairs—Aunt Tabitha being helped to bed by the faithful Mary, of course.

Presently Elizabeth came and stood beside her. She was smiling, but it was rather a ghastly attempt at mirth, for she seemed to be at the very end of her strength, and she dropped into a chair by the table.

"Don't let us talk about it—now, or ever," she said, and then proceeded immediately herself to do so. "Does it ever strike you," she said, "how people deteriorate, morally as well as physically, as they grow old? When the clouds of glory have all gone, everything else seems to go too, one by one. Ideals, our generous belief in the world and its goodness, our best impulses—they all alike slip from us or else get so cramped and tamed by self-interest and discretion that we can hardly use them. It is only the exceptional ones who don't deteriorate, Pandora. It's youth that sets the fine example, not age. It's only a warning!

"I hope I shall die at fifty—— Oh!" she shivered, "I wish Roger were here. One needs a man in an emergency, if for no other reason than that he looks so solid——"

"Shall I ring him up at the Club?"

"No, Honey! After all, what could he do? She's in bed now, very likely asleep. Mary has given her bromide. Ring up Edward, if you like, though; he

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might suggest something—— But let's have supper first!"

"I promised to take Betty up some cake and tea."

"Mary is seeing to her too. Poor baby, I was cross to her—and, after all, what did it matter? I would rather the mouse was lost there than here, for that matter. Oh, weren't you asking for champagne? But there isn't any—shall we each have a whisky and soda instead? We deserve it, goodness knows!"

Pandora accordingly, nothing loath, poured out drinks and cut the beef.

But Elizabeth would not eat; her appetite was gone, she said. She drank the whisky and soda, and sat with her elbows on the table, staring moodily in front of her.

It was unlike her to be depressed or to look on the dark side of anything, and now, all at once, just because Aunt Tabitha had flown into a rage, all her buoyancy seemed to have deserted her. She looked white and very sad.

"Aunt Tabitha," she began again presently, "how different she used to be! I remember her a dignified woman, and gentle; rather an Early Victorian sort of person, in fact, with what I believe used to be called an 'arch' smile when men were around, and a gracious manner. You must remember her so too, surely, Pandora?"

Pandora was silent. Even as a small child she had never quite liked Aunt Tabitha, having dimly discerned from early days that Miss Lorrimer's charity covered a multitude of sins, of which a certain cold, unexpressed malevolence towards herself (Pandora) was one of the most disconcerting.

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"Elizabeth," she said presently, "who *was* John?"

"The man she loved, without a doubt. Would you believe, Pandora, that in her day, Aunt Tabitha was a beauty?"

Pandora had heard it; but such was the appearance of Miss Lorrimer nowadays that she had never been able to believe it.

"Well, she was," Elizabeth assured her, "and lots of men were in love with her—John, of course, first and foremost. Why they never married, the tongue of man cannot tell. It is one of the things that will never be known now. But I have noticed one thing, Honey; these great beauties generally do play ducks and drakes with their chances, and when the sweet by-and-bye comes—in which, of course, they never had believed at all while still they were young—they find themselves stranded and left sitting with their grey hairs and their memories, keeping someone else's hearthside warm instead of their own. So, take my advice, and stick to Edward now you've got him! There, that from me sounds funny, doesn't it, when I am generally all in favour of the other thing? And, I daresay that's how women get the name of being illogical and changeable. All the same, my reasoning is sound enough. Singleness is bliss when you are young and all the world's before you, but I guess Aunt Tabitha wishes that she had the love of her youth sitting opposite her by the fireside now!"

She fell silent, gazing out of the open window with solemn, melancholy eyes. Dusk had fallen, and the subdued lamplight in the room threw the outside world into a grey, wistful twilight through which things

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loomed dimly. The row of tall white lilies that filled the air with their perfume shone glistening white against the dark green of the trellis fence that backed them; the purple faces of the pansies were a blur, but the clumps of sweet rocket made patches of light in the distance where they stood like dim quiet ghosts.

On a bough of the apple-tree on the lawn Betty's brown owl sat and stared with wide, still eyes silently into the room. Without turning her head, Elizabeth could see him, and she smiled suddenly, for his solemn gaze seemed to claim a knowledge as deep as the heart of man.

"What are you laughing at?" Pandora asked.

"At Betty's owl. He is as old as the mistakes that women make from one generation to another! Dora, I think quite a lot of women must be glad that we have only St. Paul's word for it that there is no more marrying or giving in marriage in Heaven. We needn't take his authority as absolutely final, I should think!"

Pandora agreed absently. She was far too busy wondering whether Roger would be back before she left to worry about a future existence. The present took up all her attention. She said to herself that she hoped he would not come, only to find the very next minute that she was hoping with all her heart that he would. Well, there could be no harm in hoping!

"Ah, that reminds me!" presently exclaimed Elizabeth, à propos of nothing at all. "This £30 of yours, Honey, what does it all mean? Have you really got it, wonderful child? And if so, how, when, and where?"

"I have really got it! That is to say, here's the cheque for it——" And Pandora, bending down, per-

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formed some manœuvre with the top of her stocking and fished out a crumpled piece of paper which she handed to Elizabeth, who received it as if it were a holy relic, gazing at it with respectful, beaming eyes.

"Where did you——" she began, and broke off at sight of the precise, upright signature attached. "Fanshawe—Fanshawe——" she said slowly. "So then you did——?"

Pandora nodded. "He looked in," she began to explain, and to a more suspicious person than Elizabeth it might have occurred that she was picking her words. "He had heard from Scott that I had pictures to sell, so he came to see for himself."

"And dispensed with the ceremony of an introduction and the necessity for a chaperon?" questioned Mrs. Seaton.

Pandora nodded again.

"Well, of course, as you know, I don't worry about conventionalities myself; I leave that to the people whose grandmothers came out of the ark. Still——" Elizabeth paused. That 'still' spoke for doubt and indecision. "How had Scott heard that you had pictures to sell, Dora?"

"I left word there that they had to tell him the first time he was in. There was only one way of getting that £30 for you, Elizabeth, that I could see, and I took it."

Elizabeth sprang up and helped herself to a cigarette from the silver box on the mantelpiece.

"So," she said regretfully, "you learn to go in the shady ways of life for my sake, my little Pandora! When I think of Edward and what he would say, I feel very like tearing the cheque to shreds."

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"Don't do that," laughed Pandora, "after I have been to such trouble to get it! Edward will get over it!"

She, too, took a cigarette, and Mary brought in coffee. "It is time I was going," she added when the maid had gone. But Elizabeth made no answer. She held the bit of paper in her fingers, staring at it sombrely. Suddenly she went over to Pandora and laid both hands upon her shoulders, looking into her face with searching scrutiny.

"You are quite sure it's all right about this money?" she asked. "Somehow, I have a wretched feeling that prevents me seizing it and spending it with a light heart. Do you know what that feeling is, Honey?"

"It's only that you are upset to-night, Elizabeth, and tired——"

"No—that has nothing to do with it. About this man, Fanshawe—I feel certain he is not the sort to give something for nothing. What does he want in exchange for this?"

"A sketch of himself, Elizabeth, and nothing more; so cheer up. It is quite an ordinary transaction—and when that's done, there the friendship shall end. I dislike him quite as much as you do, and I shouldn't wonder if he dyed his hair——"

"Well, I am glad—I mean that you won't let the friendship, as you call it, go any further. Glad, too, that you think it's an ordinary transaction. To me it seems that you are being suspiciously well paid. Now listen, if this man is likely to bring you one regret, however small, I would rather write to Brown's and tell them to do their worst. I'd rather go to Roger and ''fess'

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I'm in debt, and have him look pained and kiss again with tears; I'd rather dress on a penny a year henceforth. I'd rather do any mortal thing I dread; I'd much, *much* rather give you the money right back, here and now."

"But it's not necessary. You needn't tell Roger. You needn't write to Brown's, you needn't do anything but pay your bill and be happy!" Pandora twisted herself free of the other's grasp and sat down again. "I can look after myself!" she said. "You think the man wants to flirt with me. He doesn't. He was very rude nearly the whole time he was in. He admired one of my sketches, and was ready to pay the price I asked to have himself done—and that's all. If it makes you any happier to know it, I shall tell Edward—perhaps not the whole truth and nothing but the truth, but quite as much as it's good for him to know!"

Elizabeth gave her shoulders a little shake. "All right!" she said. "Have Betty along to chaperon you when he comes to sit to you. Then I'll feel easier! What a nuisance that to-morrow is Mrs. Miles' wretched party, and that I've said we'll go," she added thoughtfully. "However, on Thursday I shall spend the day in Edinburgh and pay the bill. And there's an end of worry for me—thanks to you, my little Pandora!"

When presently Pandora got up to go, it was half-past nine. Roger had not yet come in, and if she delayed any longer it would as likely as not only end in her having to walk down the hill into St. Brides by herself in the dark.

Besides, she told herself fiercely, what was the good of seeing him? What pleasure did his few coldly polite

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words, and his unmeaning glances give to her who had known just for a brief hour or so the sweet, wild intoxication of loving him and believing herself beloved.

Now that was over, past and done with, and she knew that she could never have his love, could never even have his friendship: it would be better to go away altogether out of his life, never to see him again, than to go on living in this fever of restlessness, always waiting—waiting and hoping for something to happen that never would happen. If only she had the strength and the courage to do something definite that would put herself beyond his reach, show him that she did not care; that would put him out of her thoughts and her mind, which was full of him always and always!

When she thought of Edward at all it was as a way of escape. Less and less, as the days went by, as a lover. Yet she would not willingly have let him go. Strangely enough, in the midst of her loving and her longing, and through all her desire for Roger, it was Edward who seemed to her the unchanging thing in a world of shifting sands.

To know that he was always there, loving her, ready to help her and uphold her, gave her a selfish sense of security that kept her from utter humiliation. One straight swift look from his eyes gave her the assurance that she needed him to help her to bear Roger's indifference. Without the support of his love and admiration she could not have borne the misery of it in silence. For Pandora could not live without approval—the more openly expressed the better; and Roger's open avoidance of her added insult to injury, till love and hate

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were so nicely blended that it was agony to disentangle them.

If she could have gone to Elizabeth! Pandora used to wonder sometimes what Elizabeth would say, if she knew—idle speculations that led her no further, since Elizabeth must never know. Even her generosity and affection would scarcely be likely to be proof against the knowledge that Pandora had had a past with her husband, and that she could not forget it.

So there remained only Edward. Why should not he help her? What difference could it make to him to know the truth, since he already knew that she loved someone other than himself? Surely he would only love her the more because he found himself called upon to protect her from herself! He certainly would not fail her.

As she left The Knowe behind her, the idea of confiding in him and getting him to help her took shape in her mind. Anything to end this unbearable situation! The thought that in ending it she might find herself in a worse state than before did not occur to her. Nor, if it had, would she have dwelt upon it. Pandora was always one to take risks.

Half-way down the hill, she came face to face with Roger. Although she had recognized him from as far as she could see him in the dim light, he, apparently deep in thought, had not seen her, and she was alongside of him before he looked up suddenly into her face and recognized her. He stopped short and caught her by the arm as she was for hurrying past.

"Why, Pandora!" he exclaimed, and it thrilled her with joy to hear that his voice was not quite steady as

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he said her name; "where are you rushing to, like the wind?"

He dropped her arm and drew back a few paces from her; she could see that he smiled—the smile she had caught in her sketch of him, steady and sweet and aloof, setting her at a distance, miles from him, as far as peace from storm, as joy from despair. It raised a very devil in her to provoke him to some show of feeling —if only to make his voice linger on her name in a familiar way, just once again.

"I am running from temptation!" she said, and accompanied the remark with one of her glances, innocent and calm, that never failed to puzzle him.

"Then I had better not bar the way!" he retorted lightly, and he should have turned away and left her then and there; he knew it, but the look in her eyes drew him like a magnet. He came a step nearer.

"I never see you now," he said in a low voice. "Why is that?"

She smiled—a lovely smile that made him catch his breath quickly. "Because my lord wills it, I suppose!" The words were breathed so low that he guessed, rather than heard them. Vividly there rose before him again the memory of that one night in Spain; her voice, her eyes, and the faint, faint scent she used assailed his senses now as they had done then. It seemed to him that in the dusk her face had the pale, cool lustre of a flower, and that her eyes, in spite of their calm innocence, held something else in their depths—something just beyond his reach—intoxicating, alluring, that drew him and drew him. The longing to seize her in his arms and kiss her white face till the pallor had left it,

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and her eyes till they were dim with love for him, so nearly overcame him that he turned away from her abruptly and walked a few paces from her, up the hill.

"Yes, I do will it," he said in a low voice, "and you know the reason why, Pandora."

"Because you hate me! You must hate me to treat me as unkindly as you always do!" She cried a little wildly.

"Call it hate if you like," he said. "It is certainly not indifference—so let it stand at that! As for 'unkind'—there is only one way in which I can be kind to you, Pandora, as you very well know—and there can be no repetition of what passed between us the other evening. You must see that for yourself!"

He had the last word, for without answering Pandora turned and walked quickly away down the hill, leaving him to make his way homewards, miserable, tormented with longing and love and self-contempt. He believed that he had made her cry again, and he reproached himself with every hard name he could think of, and he hated himself and regretted wildly that he had not acted differently when he had the chance—that he had not done as he knew she wanted him to, and taken her in his arms and kissed her, and kissed her. The thought of it made his senses reel; if he had stopped for one moment he would have turned and followed her, and he knew it, for he quickened his pace and did not pause till he had reached The Knowe.

He opened the door quietly and went into the dining-room and shut himself in, and mixed himself a very strong drink. He did not want to see Elizabeth just

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yet. He had a strange fear that just by looking in his haggard face she might read the wretched misery of his soul.

Meanwhile Pandora hurried on into St. Brides; tears smarted in her eyes, her spirit felt bruised and humiliated, and the only crumb of comfort she had to feed upon were the words "it certainly is not indifference." She repeated them over and over again to herself until all sense and meaning were beaten out of them, and there was nothing left but the memory of his troubled voice and his cold, averted face to torment her.

"Why do I mind so much, when I really hate him?" she asked herself passionately. "He has brought me nothing—*nothing* but misery!"

She reached home, tired out, to find that she had actually come away without her key. Marianna had been given the night out, and Pandora had not the slightest idea in which close, of the many in which the old part of St. Brides abounded, she had her dwelling.

The door of her own flat was as closely barred to her as the gate of heaven.

"God, what a life!" she moaned to herself angrily. Was there nothing to do but go back to The Knowe? She felt that she would walk the streets all night sooner than meet Roger again just now.

In a wretched temper she went down the flight of winding stairs again, and outside. Ten o'clock was ringing, and it was a still, clear, warm night, with pale silver stars and no moon. The sound of the sea was in the air. Then, as luck would have it, at the same instant the door of Edward's house opened and he stepped on to the pavement, and, turning, saw Pandora.

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She had not been thinking of him. Her meeting with Roger had put all thought of him from her head; but now, as he came quickly towards her, a sudden desperate idea occurred to her—an idea so terrible that for a moment she felt faint with the shock of it, so simple that she accepted it unhesitatingly as the inevitable solution to her difficulties. She took his outstretched hand, but had no words with which to answer his joyous greeting.

"Why, how cold you are!" he exclaimed, his welcome changing to concern, "and pale, too! Where are you going to at this hour?"

Roger had asked her the same question just a quarter of an hour ago! She gave a little laugh at the recollection of what her answer had been to him—she could not help wondering now what Edward would say if she replied, "To the Devil, if you'll come with me!" Well, he looked as if he could go to the devil with a more cheerful countenance than Roger would assume were he bound for the same quarter!

"Am I cold?" she said, stammering a little in her nervousness. "I feel burning hot! Edward, such an awkward thing has happened. Will you let me come in and tell you about it? I hate talking in the street."

"Well—if you like," he rejoined doubtfully, looking up and down the road. No one that mattered was in sight. "Let's hope Mrs. Smiley will have gone to bed," he added, and, rather unwilling, turned and led the way up into his sitting-room.

Pandora followed. She felt perfectly calm, but her hands were trembling. She could feel her heart beating

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in loud steady thumps. She wondered if Edward could hear it too. The room was in darkness. He lit the gas. He did not sit down nor ask her to do so, so she crossed over and stood by the window facing the closed door. She wished that he had not lighted the gas—not that she minded so very much after all; she felt no shyness of Edward, no feeling—she thought—of any kind was left in her for any man but Roger, and him she was about to put out of her reach for ever.

"Well," Edward said at last, "aren't you going to tell me what it is? I am on my way to see a patient, and, much as I love having you here, Pandora, this nocturnal visit is just the sort of thing my sainted aunt is looking around for, for the making of trouble!"

She scarcely seemed to hear him; she told him what had happened.

He gave a little laugh. "Good heavens!" he exclaimed. "It takes you—you and Elizabeth—to do these delightful old-world things. No one else in the world would find themselves locked out of their house at ten o'clock at night. And yet no doubt you think you can look after yourselves and the universe, and are qualified for a vote into the bargain! Not that it so very much matters in this case, for I happen to know where your Marianna has her moated grange. It's in Scott Court. If you'll wait for five minutes I'll go and wake the house up and get her key for you."

All the time he was speaking he had kept his eyes from Pandora's face. As anxious as Roger, he had seemed not to look at her, and when he had finished he turned quickly to the door.

Pandora did not move. Her voice was scarcely above

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a whisper. "I don't want to go back to-night!" she said.

He turned, and after a moment laid down his hat with a shaking hand. All the life in his face seemed concentrated in his eyes. "What do you mean?" he asked huskily.

She came nearer—almost as though against her will. "Just that," she said in her slow, soft voice: "Don't send me back!"

"Good God!" he breathed. "Pandora—you don't mean——?"

She raised her eyes to his and, without emotion, read the struggle that was going on within him.

"Do you know what you are talking about?" he asked in a low voice.

"Yes. I am very miserable. I'll marry you to-morrow—whenever you like; and to-night——"

"Well?" He crept nearer to her, holding on to the edge of the table. His eyes never left her face. They seemed to devour it—to be trying to get beyond—to tear the secret of her soul from her. As long as she lived she would never forget his eyes.

"Well?" he repeated in the same toneless, merciless voice.

"I don't want to be alone—to-night."

As she uttered the last word he caught her roughly in his arms, holding her so tight she thought her breath must go, and all the time he pressed upon her white face and her hair and her closed eyes the kisses that Roger might have given her. He held her so for a full minute without speaking, and she thought that she had won. In spite of all, a sense of quiet stole over her

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spirit. Then his voice, strained and unsteady, broke the silence, shattering her peace. His arms dropped from her, and he staggered from her to the mantelpiece and stood with his back to her.

"I think you can't know what you are asking," he said.

"Oh, heavens!" she burst out in passionate distress, "do you think I am a child?"

He turned round and looked at her with desperate questioning eyes. "I don't know," he said. "I wish I knew!"

"You may believe me, I am not. I know what I am asking. I know what I am doing—Edward!"

"Listen!" he said roughly. "I love you a damned sight too well to do anything that's going to spoil things afterwards. Don't think I don't want—what you offer. I do. But you don't understand—it's unthinkable that you can understand. I'll marry you the first day possible. And I'll never willingly leave you again; but until then, there's Elizabeth to think of."

"What's Elizabeth got to do with it?"

"Only that she trusts us both."

Pandora gave a short hard laugh. It was really too funny that this should be refused her for Elizabeth's sake.

"She need never know," she said.

"No. She wouldn't, of course! But we'd know. I should never forget it! I couldn't look her in the face again!"

"Very well!" she said after a desperate pause. "That's the end."

"The end!" He came back to her and tried to take

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her in his arms again. "Pandora! Dear Pandora!" he murmured brokenly. But she avoided him quickly.

"Of course! You can't suppose I want to marry you any more, do you?" she asked, her voice vibrating with scorn. "You surely can't suppose I shall ever want to see you again? Why—oh, I hate you! Let me go away!"

She moved towards the door, but he sprang before her and stood with his back to it, his face white and his eyes blazing with passion.

"I am not going to let you go now till you tell me the meaning of all this!" he said in a low hoarse voice. "By God, no! You come here and thrust the rôle of Joseph upon me—a most damned unpleasant one, let me tell you. You try me—well, beyond the limit. Not because you love me; I have realized that all along. Then, why? You shall tell me. By God, Pandora, I could kill you if you've been playing with me!"

She shrank back a little before the fury in his face. Not that she was really afraid. She found herself thinking quite calmly, "So it's true after all that he has a temper!" Aloud, she said:

"I don't love you—that's true; I never really have——"

"Go on!"

"I love——" At last he had made the calm voice break; she faltered and stopped.

A thrill of cruel joy shot through him. He had hurt her. "Go on!" his inexorable voice compelled her.

"Roger!"

"Seaton!" he said slowly in amazement—"Elizabeth's husband?" And for a moment he stared at her

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stupefied. Then, all at once, a thought struck him, and he caught her by the arm in a numbing grip: "Does he love you?" he demanded, and shook her to make her answer. In that moment of suspense he could indeed have killed her in the blind rage that possessed him.

But rage did not cow Pandora; nor did she strive to free herself. She answered him with a cold disdain that hurt him far more than anything else could have done.

"Do you think if he had loved me ever so little I should have come to you? It was because I thought, like a fool, that you might help me to forget him. But I was wrong. You have failed me, and I am glad you have; for I should never have forgotten him—never! And now—now—oh, my love!" Quite suddenly and without any warning, she broke down and burst into tears.

He let her cry, watching her dully, the rage gone from him, his mind confused and stunned by grief.

"So he is the man!" he found himself saying.

She made no answer but sobbed on hopelessly.

There seemed nothing left for him to say. He had had his chance—of happiness or of misery, and he had let it go. Whether he regretted it or not, he could scarcely at the moment have told. Whether it would ever come his way again, lay in the lap of the gods.

After a few minutes he turned away and left her, and, crossing the street, found the abode of Marianna, and from her received the key of Pandora's door.

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CHAPTER XV

ELIZABETH rang Pandora up on the telephone and, with some difficulty, got an answer.

"Honey!" she demanded in impatient tones, "whatever's the matter? Have you forgotten it's that infernal party of Mrs. Miles to-day? And I have been waiting and waiting! Why don't you come along? What? *What?* I can't hear a word you say! It's that damnable Exchange. I'd like to wreck it! Give the telephone a good smack, your end; it often helps. That's better! You are not well? Oh, my *dear*, I am sorry! What's that? Not in bed, only limp in an armchair? You want a change, I shouldn't wonder! Come to Edinburgh with me to-morrow for a beginning! What? The sitting of Mephistopheles? Oh, I *see*—the Vulture. Shall I send Betty? Very well, dear, but don't forget you promised to tell Edward first. Remember the divine right of fiancés!"

Silence; whilst Pandora at her end hung listlessly on to the telephone and yearned to hear the name of Roger. It came at last, sending the colour swiftly to her pale face.

"I shall have to go alone, then, to Mrs. Miles'. Roger's gone to Edinburgh, and won't be back till late, if then. And Edward's telephoned he can't, or won't. What? Oh, horrible! I hate going by myself.

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I'd take Betty, only she says such *things!* Yes? Oh, my mauve, I suppose—any old thing! Good-bye, Honey!"

Elizabeth rang off and went to put on her mauve, very depressed in spirit, and followed on tiptoe by Silas, who was staying at The Knowe these days. He often did that, because the feeding was better and more regular; besides, Roger took him for walks.

It was a mile or so to Fairview, and Elizabeth had hired a taxi. She gave Betty leave to come on condition that she promised only to speak when spoken to, and that she would not eat more than three sugar cakes.

"But, 'Lizabeth, dear, what if I'm pressed?" asked the little girl earnestly, as Mary pulled down the abbreviated skirt of her white silk frock and turned her round for inspection.

"Don't worry, you won't be!" said Elizabeth tersely. "Your thick serge coat, darling, but don't forget to take it off when you get out of the car. Mary, find me a clean hanky—with lace on, if possible. You look glum to-day, old thing: what is it?"

Elizabeth was always familiar with Mary, lavishing upon her the love that is the deserved reward of the faithful nurse. For once Mary answered her tartly:

"I'm not glum, Miss Elizabeth. You'd wonder how this party's to go off—that's all! Jennet, her that's sewing maid and my cousin, up at Fairview, was telling me Mrs. Miles was took with a faint this morning and is real bad. In her bed is where Jennet says she ought to be, but she's that set on this party like—dear knows why!" she added under her breath.

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"Well, if she were really ill, surely she'd have rung us up and put us off," said Elizabeth. "Sure I wouldn't care. For two pins I'd stay at home now!"

"Oh, Mummy!" Betty's anguished voice broke in. "*Darling!* If I'm disappointed of this, *truly* I fink I shall die—my first party! And what with keeping Aunt Tab amused and the strain and 'noyance of losing Fred'rick, life's not worf much to me anyway, nowadays!" Betty's lip quivered; she fixed eyes of passionate entreaty upon her mother. "And I had so set my heart on a little pink cake," she whispered. "Dora says she once ate one the shape of a star!"

"There, there, Sweety!" consoled Elizabeth, who was never proof against a pathetic appeal. "You shall go and eat pink cakes and chocolate cakes and goodness only knows what sort of cakes—and if you are sick to-morrow, don't blame me!"

"The motor's at the door," put in Mary sombrely, "and the Lord send the man knows the way to turn round again in that narrow bit there!"

Elizabeth and Betty started. Betty sat bolt upright and longed to pass the milkgirl (her special enemy) and the Butcher's boy (her greatest friend). As neither of these desirable persons were abroad she resigned herself to making hideous faces at other inoffensive people that they chanced to meet.

Elizabeth, lost in thought, noticed nothing. As the motor turned out of the gate, in a flash of inspiration there had come to her the inevitable and only fitting conclusion for her novel, and peace entered her soul and a great contentment. At such times as these she felt like the *Nunc Dimittis*. The end was in sight and,

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added to that, to-morrow her bill would be paid. She felt not only at peace with the world, but even as if she were one of these amiable people that love their fellow-men.

In this enviable frame of mind they entered the imposing gates of Fairview, and presently drew up at the door of the house.

Mrs. Miles was on the lawn receiving her guests in the shade of the magnificent trees for which the place was famous; the gracious dignity of this setting dwarfed these people and made them seem insignificant, Elizabeth thought; strangely out of keeping, too, in their fashionable garments, and with their high-pitched laughter and voices, with a scene that was full of charm and romance. Fairview had historical associations, and had been a show place for over a century.

When she caught sight of them, Mrs. Miles detached herself from a group of women and came hurriedly towards them. She wore grey crêpe-de-chine, and her face was very much made up. She looked frightfully ill, and the red on her cheeks was in shocking contrast to her pallor; painfully suggestive, somehow, of rouge on the face of a corpse.

She held out her hand to Elizabeth, but her eyes travelled past her and past Betty, and her face fell. "You've not brought Pandora," she faltered.

"Pandora is not well," Elizabeth answered, surprised by the look of deep distress on the other's face. "Nothing much! She works too hard when she works at all. If she had known you would be disappointed——"

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"Oh, it doesn't matter!" Mrs. Miles interrupted. "I like her—that's all! I'll ask her to come another day when I am alone. I haven't much time left, I am sorry to say!"

"Oh! Are you going away?"

"Yes—for good and all this time—to the place from whence there's no coming back! I see you are horrified—but I don't particularly mind myself. Why should I? 'Ich habe genossen das Erdlichesglück!' as the Germans say!" She gave a weary little laugh that might have been at Elizabeth's shocked face or at her own philosophy. "Is this Betty?" she broke off to ask. "There are no other children here, to-day, I'm afraid, but I daresay you will amuse yourself. Children usually do if they are allowed to do so in their own way. Walk down that little path and turn to the right, and you'll come to my menagerie! I suppose you are not afraid of animals?"

"I *love* them," said Betty, with shining eyes, "and I'm not 'fraid of anything but wild adders, and you don't come across them very often. May I go, 'Lizabeth, dear?"

"Certainly! But if there's a pond, try not to fall into it," cautioned Elizabeth absently. She was still watching Mrs. Miles with bewildered, troubled eyes.

"I simply can't believe it!" she said when Betty had taken herself off in search of the animals. "I do hope you are wrong!"

"It is very good of you—but what does it matter? It's what we've all got to come to—sooner or later. The funny thing is nobody does believe in Death till he is at the door!"

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"I am sure you ought to be in bed, and send for a specialist—or something."

"I have had specialists. But the one who can give me a new heart has not graduated yet, Mrs. Seaton! As to bed—I am not going there till time's up. This is my last party, though I have not told anyone so but yourself. When I say good-bye to all these people at six o'clock, little they'll think that it is the last they will ever see of me!"

Again, the little weary laugh that made Elizabeth shudder. She wished from the bottom of her soul that she had never come here to-day. She felt resentful with Fate for having thrust upon her this horrible experience. It was not as if she had ever cared two straws about Mrs. Miles, scarcely had she known her; yet, now, without warning, here she was brought face to face with a tragedy, the pity and distress of which would have been unbearable had the woman been a friend. Could she have found relief in tears or have tried to offer consolation of any kind, the situation would have been easier, but there was something about Mrs. Miles that kept pity at a distance and made it impossible to shed a tear in her presence.

Elizabeth found herself longing most ardently for Roger—or for Edward.

Presently Mrs. Miles drew in her breath with a little gasp, almost as though she were in pain. They were facing the house, and, following the direction of her eyes, Elizabeth saw that some new arrivals were making their way towards them across the lawn. Elizabeth almost laughed when she saw that it was Mrs. Mackenzie and three of her dear girls whose approach

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suggested, in a subtle way, a triumphal progress, so proud did they appear to be of the fact that they bore Mr. Fanshawe in their midst.

"Who is it?" Mrs. Miles asked in a faint voice. "My sight is not at all good these days!" She raised her lorgnette as she spoke, but with so shaky a hand that she was obliged to let it drop again.

Elizabeth told her. "It's only Mr. Fanshawe," she said, "and one or two samples of the Mackenzie family—if I could help you at all"—she added doubtfully.

"Don't trouble! I had forgotten for the moment that they were coming—that the Mackenzies were coming, that is. Mr. Fanshawe"—she paused—"is my lawyer. Only last night I sent for him about my will. He was——" She broke off suddenly. "I must go and greet them!" she added in a different tone of voice. "Will you forgive me for having made a confidante of you, Mrs. Seaton?"

"Of course! I am only dreadfully sorry." Elizabeth found herself alone, and Mrs. Miles was surrounded by Mackenzies all a little too friendly and at their ease in their anxiety to show Elizabeth how very much better they really knew their hostess than she did.

In sickness as in health, however, Mrs. Miles might be trusted to keep people at their distance, and, after a minute, she detached herself from them and turned to Mr. Fanshawe who was standing close by looking on with a cynical smile, twisting his lips. A curious callous look came over his face as Mrs. Miles addressed him—almost as if he hated her, and found it hard to

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be polite to her. After a moment he left her and wandered off aimlessly—no doubt in search of pretty faces, Elizabeth reflected. For the ill, the unhappy or the passée, he would have no use.

Whether others enjoyed themselves that day or not, Elizabeth neither knew nor cared. For her, it was a wretched party. People came and went, and she talked to them and joined in the laughter, and all the time she felt as though she were living in a nightmare.

Mrs. Muir asked her and Roger and Pandora all to dinner that night, and she accepted without knowing what she did.

The Mackenzie girls wore grey coats and skirts and kept together; they looked down their noses at Elizabeth, whom they had been taught to avoid, whilst they in their turn found themselves avoided by people they would have liked to cultivate, for their besetting sin was dullness. The "reasons" at which their hopeful mother had hinted for bringing them this afternoon were not apparent. They consoled themselves with much tea and many cakes.

Kate Wilbur wore a new hat, and the story of Elizabeth's purple having reached her ears, no doubt through the agency of Mrs. Muir, she regarded Mrs. Seaton sourly, and from a distance.

Elizabeth was not even aware of her presence. Unused to sadness, now that she was brought face to face with it, she had never felt so depressed and miserable in her life. She longed for half-past five and the motor and home, and Pandora to confide in, and she answered people at random or not at all; and all the time she was trying not to watch Mrs. Miles, who

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dragged about with a haggard fixed smile on her painted face, looking more awful than anything Elizabeth could ever have imagined.

It was over at last. With a feeling of unmitigated thankfulness she beheld the approach of her hired car; Betty was with difficulty separated from a minute faun by whose side she had spent the afternoon, and they started.

She had dreaded saying good-bye to Mrs. Miles, but she need not have feared, for, after all, Mrs. Miles said nothing but the conventional "So good of you to have come!" But she held Elizabeth's hand for perhaps a moment longer than was customary. "Tell Pandora," she began, and then stopped abruptly. Elizabeth did not ask what she was to tell Pandora, and she never knew. As they drove out of the lodge gates she drew in a deep breath.

"Good God!" she exclaimed. "May I never enter this place again!"

"Mummy, sweetest!" whispered Betty, wriggling nearer, and insinuating a coaxing arm round her mother's waist. "I do fink Mrs. Miles is lovely! Just to fink! She's going away and she has no more use for that darling faun, and she says if you and Daddy don't *persistently* object——" Betty made a dramatic pause, and fixed her eyes full of passionate appeal upon Elizabeth's abstracted face. "Darling, do give your consent!" she urged, clasping Elizabeth's gloved hand to her cheek.

"Good heavens, child!" laughed Mrs. Seaton. "Have him if you like, but let it be understood that he doesn't live in the house. And what on earth will he want to

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eat—wild flowers and honey and the wings of blue butterflies soaked in dew?"

"Bread and milk, darling, wif a *s'picion* of cream for a great treat on Sunday, and the rest he'll forage for himself, same as calfs do!"

Betty kept silent for a time gazing before her with ecstatic eyes into a future made rosy by the presence of a little faun. After a while she made a remark which received no answer.

"If only he could be persuaded to have one or two little ones!" she said.

And, as they reached home, and she stepped with dignity from the car, she added—"I've almost *quite* determined to call him Jos'phine. What's your advice, Mummy?"

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CHAPTER XVI

EDWARD rang at the door of Pandora's flat. After a few minutes, it was opened to him by Marianna who peered out into the dimly lit passage with a scared face, for it was past ten at night. The gaping front of her black dress, and the dishevelled state of her head, betrayed the fact that she had been in the act of undressing when the bell had summoned her. At sight of Edward's pale and troubled face she gave a cry—for Marianna lived always in the expectation of something dreadful happening, and, to her easily alarmed mind, the unusual always heralded the worst.

He silenced her with an impatient gesture. "Has Miss Pandora gone to bed, yet?" he asked.

The girl shook her head and advanced a step out into the passage. "No, sir," she whispered with chattering teeth.

"Well, just go and tell her that I want to speak to her, out here. No, I won't come in. Tell her it's most important and that there is no time to lose."

Clutching her garments together, Marianna shuffled away. He could hear her knock on the door of the studio and call out—"Excuse me, Miss—It's a message from the Doctor—Dr. Rattray, Miss."

"Oh, go to the devil—go to bed and leave me alone!" called Pandora angrily.

Marianna turned back with a hopeless face. "There,

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sir," she said, "she's been in there all day, and won't eat nothing but a cup of tea and a morsel of——"

Edward pushed her aside and strode up to the door and knocked sharply.

"Pandora! It is I, Edward!" he called out. "I must see you!"

"Go away! I'm busy!"

"I'll not go till I've seen you. D'you think I've come for fun?"

An instant—then the door opened slowly and Pandora stood in the opening, erect and very white. No colour about her there seemed, but her dark, unhappy eyes.

"Well?" she said in a low voice. "What do you want to say?"

It was plain for him to see that she considered he had forced himself upon her and that, for her part, she had never wished to see him or speak to him again.

He turned a shade paler, at which she softened somewhat; she put out her hand to him and her eyes grew gentle.

"If you have come to say you regret—last night, please don't say it! From your own point of view you were right, and I—well, I am glad, too, now; for if you had—done what I asked you to, it could not have made any real difference: I know that now——"

He interrupted her; he could not endure to hear her uttering words that struck him to the heart, in that calm, low voice of hers. Not for worlds would he have confessed to her of the passionate regret and longing through which he had dragged out intolerable hours since he had seen her last.

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"Strange as it may seem to you," he said harshly, "that's not what I have come to say to you at all." He paused, then went on in a different voice. "Mrs. Miles has been taken very ill. I have been with her since half-past seven. She is dying, Dora, and she wants to see you first. There is not much—not any—time to lose. I have 'phoned the garage to send me round a car. Something has gone wrong with the brake of mine and I can't use it."

All the time he was speaking she stared at him stupidly. Even if Mrs. Miles were dying, what on earth did it matter to her—Pandora? It was sad for Mrs. Miles, of course, but Pandora did not see why she should be expected to care. She hardly knew the woman, and now the thought of going to her when she was dying was too horrible for anything. Involuntarily, she drew back a step. "Oh, I don't want to go!" she said. "I can't go!"

He laid his hand on her arm. "Just wait one moment," he said, "and I'll get your coat. You can't motor six miles in a garment such as you are wearing."

"But, Edward——"

He faced her impatiently. "Well—what is it? You are not going to refuse to come? Here—this coat is fur-lined—the very thing! Slip into it!"

Against her will, utterly bewildered, Pandora found herself obeying him. "Why should she want to see me?" she asked. "I scarcely know her. I am sorry she is dying, but I don't want to go!"

"I hear the car," he said. "Come on!" He took her by the arm, and they went down the stairs together and out into the quiet night before she well knew to

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what she was consenting. He dismissed the chauffeur and helped her into the front seat beside himself.

When they were through the gateway of the town and running out on the country road she turned to him uneasily. "Why won't you tell me," she said, "what she wants me for? It's unreal. It frightens me. Edward, if you go away and leave me there alone to-night, I'll never forgive you!"

"I won't leave the house without you, Pandora."

"Still—you haven't told me what I want to know!"

"The unhappy bit is that I may not explain anything. She will do that herself. But you mustn't be frightened—or—or unhappy. Whatever happens, if it is any comfort to you, you have always got me, remember!"

His voice was very low; he looked straight ahead of him with set face. She gave him a little glance and looked away again. Such an assurance could give her no comfort, for she did not want him.

They were passing The Knowe at the moment, and she turned in her seat to gaze up the dark avenue in the ridiculous hope that Roger might be in sight. Of course he was not. He was probably sitting with Elizabeth, telling her about his day in Edinburgh. And Elizabeth, of course, did not care whether he was there or not. Most likely she was longing to be alone that she might get on with her writing. . . . Pandora heaved a sigh, and a sharp pang of bitter jealousy, the first she had ever felt for Elizabeth, shot through her heart. If only she were with Roger now! though he did not love her—to be in his presence were happiness.

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She said this to herself, forgetting the pain and humiliation his presence almost always caused her, forgetting that only twenty-four hours ago she had offered herself to Edward, been ready to marry him, to take an irrevocable step—no matter what—if only in so doing she might put herself beyond his reach for ever. In the night and day that had followed, she had come to feel grateful to Edward for having refused; if she could not have Roger she felt that at least it was better to go through life loving him than trying to forget him.

At twenty-three, the prospect of unrequited love is a terrible one—the more terrible because youth meets trouble believing it to be as lasting as life itself. Tears smarted in her eyes. At that moment Edward turned to her, and, taking one hand from the wheel, put his arm round her and drew her to him and kissed her.

His lips were wet with her tears. "Oh, Pandora!" he said huskily; "Pandora!"

She did not try to free herself. His touch meant nothing to her, and all her anger had died away and given place to gratitude. In a way, his presence even comforted her; she felt it would be a relief to talk to him about Roger.

But it was about himself that Edward wanted to talk, not about Roger at all. He could not believe that her love for a married man and the husband of Elizabeth could be a real, enduring obstacle to her marrying himself. He had had too much success with women to be easily daunted now, or to accept defeat when for the first time in his life he really loved. The thought of Pandora possessed him utterly, to the exclusion of every

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other consideration. Since last night, he had lived through a hell that he would not have faced again to save his honour ten times over—he knew that now, when his arm was round her, and he kissed her beautiful unwilling lips and felt the salt tears upon her cheeks—tears that were not shed for him but for another man. The blood ran like fire in his veins, and he murmured passionate broken entreaties in her ear that did but succeed in filling her with a deeper longing for the forbidden man.

With a sudden effort, more of will than of body, she freed herself from him and sat upright.

"Please stop," she said. "It's not a bit of good! There is nothing I am so sure of as that I will never marry you now—never! never!"

"I'll not believe that," he answered huskily. "I'll not rest now until you are my wife!" And he put out his arm once more to draw her to him.

But she pushed him from her with a quick, angry movement. "Oh, will you never understand!" she cried. "Do you want me to tell you in so many words that you are nothing to me any more—that you never will be—that every word you say and every kiss you give me only make we want him the more? If you wanted me you should have taken me last night when I was mad and gave you the chance, for it will never come again!" She stopped, panting and out of breath. Cruelty could go no further, and she had made him understand at last.

She felt a pang of compunction when she saw his face—the sort of sorrow one feels at having lost one's temper and hit a faithful dog. But the feeling soon passed.

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Nothing can exceed the callousness of a woman to the man whose love she does not return, except it be the cruelty of a man in like case.

A few minutes later they turned in at the big gates leading up to Fairview.

The man-servant who presently opened the door to them answered Edward's hurried question: "Yes, Mrs. Miles was still alive."

Edward helped Pandora out of her coat. "Come on, then," he said, and taking her by the arm led her upstairs.

At the threshold of the door, at which he stopped, Pandora hesitated and drew back, looking at him imploringly. "*Must* I go in?" she whispered.

For answer he opened the door, and they went in together.

Mrs. Miles lay in a big four-poster without curtains or hangings of any kind. The room was very large and square, and the two shaded standard lamps scarcely seemed to light it at all. A nurse in uniform came forward and said something in a low tone to the doctor. The woman in the bed kept her burning eyes on the cold, set face of Pandora. She lay very still; nothing about her seemed to live—only just her eyes and the intelligence behind them.

Compelled by these shining, imploring eyes, Pandora moved slowly up to the bed; a will stronger than her own seemed to be behind her, commanding her to do things—the will of the dying woman in whom the spirit, to the last, was triumphing over the body.

Pandora could not remove her gaze from the wasted, sunken face; it fascinated and horrified her, and all the

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time it reminded her of something or of someone—she could not think whom.

"You wanted me?" she said in a low voice.

Mrs. Miles looked beyond the girl at Edward standing behind her. "Leave us alone!" she said.

Edward and the nurse went. Pandora heard the door close after them. She felt her heart sink with fear. This woman was going to tell her something dreadful, she felt sure of it, and she would have given anything on earth not to hear it—to get away. She wished she had not been so unkind to Edward. If she had been nice to him, she felt that he would not have deserted her now.

She tried to speak, to beg Mrs. Miles to spare her, but her heart was beating too rapidly. She was filled with a sickening dread. It seemed as if the silence was never going to end, when Mrs. Miles spoke at last.

"Won't you come nearer? Come close up to the bed," she said. "I am too weak to talk loud."

Pandora moved reluctantly nearer and stood looking down on the sick woman. Those glittering, imploring eyes fascinated and compelled her, and baffled her with their reminder of something that just eluded her.

"I wish you would tell me what you want with me," she said.

"Want? Ah yes! I have outlived all my wants but this last, and now that it is granted me I am going to die. Say my *Nunc Dimittis* and go. Do you believe in another world, Pandora?"

On the spur of the moment, Pandora could not exactly say. She and Elizabeth had some sort of a nebulous, comforting belief in the continuity of personality under

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greatly improved conditions, but it was not easy to put it into words whilst the eyes watched her with a terrible, haunting sadness.

"Well," Mrs. Miles broke in on her hesitation. "After all, I didn't ask you to come that I might enquire into your creed. *Toute autre chose!* No, I want to tell you that I am sorry——"

"*Sorry?*"

"Yes. I won't ask your forgiveness, because what I have done to you is beyond that, and you would not be likely to grant it——" She paused, gasping a little as though she found it difficult to breathe. Pandora moved a step nearer.

"I don't think I have much to forgive you," she said, with a desperate effort to believe that this was all—that there was no secret, dreadful reason why she should have been sent for, nothing beyond the exaggerated remorse of a dying woman for little slights and unkindnesses in the past. "Please don't think any more about it," she added entreatingly.

Mrs. Miles looked at her silently for a moment, searchingly, fixedly; it was almost as if she were trying to convey something to the girl without the medium of speech.

"How is—your Aunt Tabitha?" she asked at last.

"She is—all right, I suppose—much as usual. I didn't know you knew her."

"Yes. She is my mother."

"Aunt Tabitha!"

"Yes. She doesn't look like anybody's mother; but, long ago, she was mine. She always said she would outlive me, and here she is, keeping her word. Poor

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lady! It is a shame to take away her character at the age of nearly ninety. She lost it, you know, ever so many years ago; and worked so hard to get it back again. Odd, how strangely alike our lives have been!" she added in a wandering voice, and closed her eyes.

Pandora thought that she was dead, but suddenly she opened them wide again on the girl's frightened face.

"No; she was never married!" she said with a little twisted smile. "I don't know why—nobody knows why, or ever knew. She was a beauty in her day—an Early Victorian Beauty, my dear, not like you—and an heiress . . . beauty and money—they are both gone now. . . . The man's name——"

She hesitated, and a pained expression flitted over her face. "Why I have forgotten my own father's name," she murmured.

"John!" prompted Pandora in a breathless voice.

"Ah!—John. I never knew the other. He was a fascinating man. . . . I remember him though he died when I was quite small. . . . Gay, too—nothing could quench his spirit. . . . And he has passed it on to us, Pandora——"

"To—us?"

"Yes. Ah, I see—I thought you had guessed. . . . I'm so dreadfully tired."

There was a horrible silence. Pandora tried to ask a question, but her throat felt as if it had closed up so that she could not form the words. And after all, what did it matter, since she already knew the answer to the question she would put? It seemed to her that she had known the answer from the moment she had entered the room and seen Mrs. Miles lying on the bed watch-

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ing her, always watching her with glittering eyes that reminded her—— Of course, it was of Aunt Tabitha that these eyes reminded her.

Outside a little breeze stirred and fluttered the curtains by the window, somewhere in the house a clock chimed.

"How long is it till dawn?" Mrs. Miles' voice was weaker now. Pandora longed for her to die.

"It has just struck eleven," she managed to say. "Please let me fetch Dr. Rattray——"

"No; don't go yet! I'll die before dawn, and I have more to say to you yet. . . . Give me some of these drops or I can't go on!"

Pandora measured out as the label on the bottle directed, but her hand shook so that she spilled some of the liquid.

Mrs. Miles smiled faintly. "It doesn't matter, I shan't want them again," she said.

She swallowed the drops that Pandora held to her lips and spoke in a stronger voice.

"Is it true that you are going to marry Edward Rattray?" she asked.

Pandora hesitated, for it was evident that to tell Mrs. Miles the truth, that her engagement to Edward was at an end, would distress her greatly; whereas the lie might make her die more happily.

"Yes, I suppose so," she said unwillingly.

The other gave a little sigh. "I'm glad," she said. "I like him, and he'll keep you straight. . . . We are not noted for prudence, you see . . . none of us." She closed her eyes again to open them presently with one of her hauntingly sad smiles. "We are descended

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from Charles II., you know—and one of his mistresses who is not quoted much in history, and that may account for it."

"Who was my father?" whispered Pandora hoarsely —"not——"

Her mother's eyes dwelt upon her with a look of understanding tinged with cynical amusement.

"Make your mind easy, my dear," she whispered. "Not the late William Miles. My wild oats were all gathered in before I married him——"

"Then——?"

"Now I can tell you no more——"

"His name—at least tell me his name!" cried Pandora entreatingly.

The tired head moved restlessly on the pillow. "I promised him—and I have kept the secret all these years," she said in a troubled voice. "After all, what does the name matter? His name isn't yours; nothing —nothing of his is yours . . . and nothing mine—any longer. His love—long, long since gone." Her face was wet with tears.

"Don't cry!" entreated Pandora. She felt as if she were in a nightmare. "Is he dead too?" she whispered.

"Dead! It's so long ago. He died to me in Spain —when you were born."

"In Spain——"

"You wear your opal. I am glad. I knew who you were the first time of all that I saw you, by the opal. We chose it together in Seville when—when we loved each other. I paid for it . . . keep it always. And the money—your money in the silver box—it was John's."

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"But he was Spanish? At least tell me that my father was Spanish!" pleaded Pandora.

This was the only thing left for her to cling to. Queerly enough, she felt that she could bear anything if only the one illusion of grandeur were left to her. And it seemed as if it were to be so, as if the eyes smiled assent. She hugged the belief to her and forebore to say more.

"I wonder if you would kiss me," whispered Mrs. Miles, her voice now very faint.

Inwardly shuddering, Pandora bent over her and just touched the white cheek with her lips.

Her mother gave a little sigh. "I don't expect you to forgive me," she whispered. "For my own sake and his, I abandoned you—but at least I took care to leave you in good hands—if you can call my mother's hands good!" She closed her eyes again and was silent.

"Shall I call Edward?" asked Pandora.

"I've left you all I had—this house, and everything. There's a key under my pillow. It opens the ivory box on my dressing table. Take it away with you and——"

A change passed over her face. She remained staring, but her gaze shifted from the face of Pandora, and with eyes from which the light slowly faded she lay gazing out into the night.

Pandora flew to the door and tore it open as Edward came in. He passed to the bedside.

"Go downstairs now," he said gently. "There's a fire in the morning room, and I'll come presently."

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CHAPTER XVII

PANDORA was sitting listlessly in her studio. The window was wide open and the sun streamed in; a faint breeze flapped at the curtains and shook the scent from the pansies which stood in a purple jar upon the table.

Pandora had done nothing all morning. Never in all her moods had she passed such an idle morning as this—yet it had not seemed empty at all, far from it—into it had been crowded a horrible strangeness that filled her thoughts. Everything seemed unreal, distorted, sinister, as things seem in a bad dream or in a delirium of fever.

She had tried to paint as usual, but the bold gaiety of what Edward called "the composite face" mocked her and seemed now dreadfully unreal—as unreal as everything else that she had believed to be true. For a long time she sat before it and stared at it dully. Soon she ceased to see it. She saw other pictures instead. One of these was of a white, white face, in which nothing seemed to live but the eyes.

She turned from the memory of these eyes with a shiver, but when she had evaded it there was another, scarcely less haunting, awaiting her. And the central figure of this was Edward.

Pandora had imagined that she knew life. So she did—in the way one knows a language from a text-book

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but has never heard it spoken. Events of the past two nights had taught her just how far text-books can carry one in a foreign country. She had never guessed that under a gay and casual exterior there could exist such passions as she had evoked in the man with whom she had thought it safe to play. . . . Yes, and to make use of.

In the midst of these unhappy musings the bell of the flat rang, and Elizabeth presently walked into the room.

Pandora saw that she was adhering to her plan of going up to Edinburgh for the day. She wore a blue serge coat and skirt and the purple hat; in her hands she carried a little black moiré bag, odd gloves, and a parcel which had come untied, and which contained a pair of brown shoes of Betty's to be matched.

She kissed Pandora with more than ordinary affection.

"Honey—how done up you look!" she cried in concern at the girl's face. "That woman!"

Pandora looked at her with heavy lidded eyes. "Yes," she said slowly, "she was my mother. Isn't it strange? I never guessed—never had a suspicion. And to think how we have disliked her and thought her the greatest snob of the lot! My mother! And all she wanted was to try and forget she'd ever had me!"

She was silent. It filled Elizabeth with raging pity to see the listless, shocked look in her face. Something of her independence and joy of life had been taken from her, and she could not recover her balance.

It seemed to Elizabeth as if something more than Mrs. Miles must be at the bottom of it. After all, she had always known herself to be a foundling, and it

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didn't seem to matter much now who her mother might be. As well Mrs. Miles as any other.

In thinking this, Elizabeth did not realize the terrible blow that had been dealt to Pandora's pride. Mrs. Miles in disclosing herself had wakened her to a rude reality. She was no longer a child of mystery and romance—just a bastard, to be hidden away and denied like all the rest of them.

"Don't you take it to heart!" she said gently. "She was as good as any you could have expected to have. What I mean is that no woman who could go and abandon a little baby in the way you were abandoned could have been up to much. I have always seen that; but, on the other hand, she might have proved to be someone much more of a nuisance than Mrs. Miles, who at least had the sense to keep quiet till she was dying."

"Elizabeth—why did she tell me? I didn't want her, any more than she wanted me. I was quite happy—six weeks—a month ago—oh, how happy I was!"

"And you will be happy again, Honey! Nothing lasts, not even trouble——"

"But love does," murmured Pandora, so low that Elizabeth did not hear her. She went on speaking, trying to console Pandora, and glancing every now and then at her watch as she did so, for she did not want to miss her train.

"Of course, it is ever so much more attractive living in a sort of halo of mystery, so to speak, than having a ready-made parent thrust upon you very much against your will," she said. "Do you know, the strange thing is that Mary knew all the time! Knew, and never hinted a word of it—the perfidious wretch! Which

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just shows, Dora, that even the people you read like a book have some pages gummed together that you can't get at. Yes, even you, Honey, have your secret thoughts that you cannot tell to me."

Pandora turned from her rather abruptly, a deep flush on her face, but Elizabeth, absorbed in her own thoughts, did not notice it.

"Yes, and I have my secrets from you, and from Roger too, though I scarcely realized it before," she went on—"things impossible to say to you or to him or to anyone. Thoughts one never wants to put into words. And if that is what people mean when they lament about the loneliness of the soul, I don't think it is lamentable at all. For my part, I like to think that there is a sanctuary within ourselves that is a refuge—yes, even from our dearest!"

Pandora was scarcely listening. "How on earth did Mary come to know?" she asked fretfully.

"Mary was her maid, it seems, once upon a time, ever so long ago, and more devoted to her than anything on earth. Is still, I believe. Aunt Tabitha never acknowledged Mrs. Miles as her daughter. Cynthia, her name was. She hoped nobody knew of her existence, and she sent her abroad to be brought up and educated. To Spain, I believe.

"Aunt Tabitha was rich, in these days, and the John person whom she never married was rich too, and made her a good allowance for Cynthia. Between them, they seem to have been fairly heartless about the child—much as *she* became, in after days, to you. She was educated in a convent, and the idea was to have made her a nun. But, evidently she was not of the stuff that

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saints are made of, for she escaped with—the man who became your father——"

"Elizabeth——"

"My dear, I have not the slightest idea who he was," said Mrs. Seaton firmly. "If Mary knows, she won't tell. Red-hot pincers wouldn't tear the secret from her; but I doubt if she does know. She appeared on the scene after you were born, by which time the person from whom you presumably inherit your eyes and your hair and your general air of seeming to have bought the goodwill of the universe and paid ready money for it—by which time, I say, he had wearied of the whole transaction and left poor Cynthia to repent in quite the fashion approved of by the Church and all the salt of the earth—I mean the Righteous. Really, Honey, I don't know why you are so proud of your myth of a father—I should hate him!"

"It is just because he is a myth that I don't. If I could realize him there would be nothing left. At present he is like God. I believe in him—that's all. It's *her* I hate," she added in ungrammatical passion a moment later. "I suppose you think I am wicked?"

"Certainly not," replied Elizabeth. "She was a selfish creature, from the time she abandoned you, till the time she did worse still and claimed you again. I have only got about five minutes, then I must fly. It is only a superstition that it comes natural to love one's parents; on the contrary, it's fatally easy not to. That's why I am so lenient with Betty. Even a child must find it sickening to have someone always at hand with a perfect right to control one's actions. And that reminds me, dear, will you be an angel and go along to

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The Knowe this morning? The fact is, I should not have come away to-day at all. Mary does nothing but weep, so I told her to take the day off, and she has gone off to Fairview. Goodness only *knows* when she will be back! It may be night. If you would stick a rice pudding in the oven for Betty's dinner, it would be a comfort to me. Make it big enough for Tabitha too, otherwise she'll browse on bread and honey all day long, and that's *so* bad for her digestion! As for Roger, he'll spend the day at the Club. He is playing golf this morning with Admiral Truefitt. Now I must go. I'll bring you back something lovely for a wedding present. Something quite original."

"Elizabeth——!" Pandora got up and walked with her to the door. "I must tell you something——"

"But my train! I do so hate the way they always start punctually from St. Brides! I'm sure they don't from any place else. And, by the way, could you lend me a pair of gloves? I have brought away odd ones."

Pandora went into her bedroom, and, after a minute's search, found a pair of black suède. "It's about Edward. We have had a frightful quarrel," she said with heightened colour, as she gave them to Elizabeth.

Elizabeth made a gesture of despair.

"Dora, you must tell me about it when I come back to-night! Stay to supper! Stay the night! I refuse to believe that any quarrel with Edward can be serious. Men with his sort of eyes may fire up, but they don't sulk. He may have been hating you yesterday, but he'll love you ten times more to-day just *because*. So don't fret about him or Mrs. Miles or anyone! Would you like a string of Chinese beads?"

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"I don't want a wedding present at all—you mustn't get me one—truly!"

But Elizabeth only laughed, and, catching up her parcels, was off.

From force of habit Pandora went to the window and, leaning out, looked across at No. 56. But Edward was not in sight. The blinds of his sitting room were neatly pulled up half-way, and the windows were thrown wide. Pandora was conscious of a growing sense of desolation which had gradually ousted her anger with him.

The truth was she missed him, and would have been glad to have his friendship though she had no use for him as a lover.

She took her hat and went out. It was very hot, and the sun beat down upon her through her filmy black blouse. The hill seemed longer than usual, and dustier, and barer of shade. She thought she was never going to reach the top of it.

When at last she turned in at the gate she had the feeling that weeks had passed since she was there last. Yet it was not forty-eight hours. The house was very quiet, for Mary had already gone.

Betty was sitting quietly in the elm-tree, but she did not reveal her presence, for she was playing a game that everyone in the world had died of the black death except herself, and that she was taking refuge from "a scourge of wild beasts" that were prowling about to find her. Of course it wouldn't do to call Dora, for as she passed the tree on her way to the house, she (Betty) could see perfectly well that this was not one of the rather rare days when her dear Dora would be at all likely to join in games. So, from the leafy perch she

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watched Pandora enter the house and heard her call, first "Betty!" then "Mary!" Last of all, in a very much lower voice, she called "Roger!"

But nobody answered, and she did not come out again.

After a time Betty grew tired of the game. There was not even a dog to represent the "scourge," for Silas had taken himself off to call on a friend immediately after breakfast, and had not yet returned; and to make matters worse Aunt Tabitha presently appeared, and walking straight to the tree held a long and abusive conversation with her, addressing her as "Cynthia." If there was one thing more than another that annoyed Betty it was being called Cynthia, and just within the last few days Aunt Tabitha had got into the habit of it. She scarcely ever called her now by any other name, and Betty, who in a pitying protective sort of way was fond of the old lady, felt the slight to her personality deeply.

She clambered to the ground and walked off with dignity, leaving Aunt Tabitha quavering far in the rear.

"Where are you off to now, naughty one? I lose sight of you so!" she whimpered.

"I'm going to tell John!" retorted Betty cruelly over her shoulder, and made her way to her favourite place on the top of the gate, feeling in her pocket, as she went, for her beloved pea-shooter.

For a long time nobody passed. The butcher's boy came, and was allowed to enter the gate only on revealing the contents of his basket. On his way out again he borrowed the pea-shooter to take aim at a shepherd driving a flock of sheep down into the town. His aim

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was considerably surer than that of Betty, and the subsequent conversation between him and the shepherd, with the little girl as audience, would have caused Roger serious annoyance could he have heard it.

Just about one o'clock, as the game was beginning to pall, the butcher's boy having moved on long since, the whirr of an approaching motor quickened her flagging interest. The next minute Edward in his little two-seater drew up at the gate.

"Betty, is Pandora by any chance at The Knowe?" he asked quietly, not at all in his usually cheerful tones.

"Yes, she is," answered the child, gazing with interest at his white face and unhappy eyes. "Have you got a headache?" she inquired gently. "'Lizabeth has one, off and on, on very hot days when she's working extra hard, and then she lets me make her a cup of tea, terrible strong, with just a whisk of brandy in it. Would you let me serve one for you?"

"No, Betty. That's not the kind of headache I have. Time and common sense are more likely to cure it than tea and brandy. I wonder if you would give Pandora a message from me?"

"Oh, *most certainly!* Could you lend me a hand down? Somehow I always seem to get my pinny fixed into the post if there's no one by to help!"

He got out of the car and helped her down.

"Thank you so kindly!" returned the child, alarmingly grown up all at once with the importance of being trusted with a message. "I'd ask you to lunch," she added, "only I guess there's not over much to eat to-day with them all being out."

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"I don't want any lunch, Betty, thank you very much —but what's happened to the household?"

"Mary's out. She did nothing but cry. I b'lieve she must have had the tic—she suffers, you wouldn't believe, from it, Edward, specially when rain's coming, and drinks hot ginger for it. To-day I was prowling in the kitchen press—the big one where the mice traps are. I make it my *special* duty to let them out *'mediately* before breakfast in the mornings, before Mary gets them to drown. Luckily, ours are the old-fashioned kind of traps, as Mummy says it makes her feel sick to think of their poor necks pinned down. She prefers them to be drowned. But I call it shameful cruel to kill such helpless sweets as mice—don't you?"

"I am afraid I am too hard-hearted to worry about the sufferings of mice, Betty."

"That's what Mary says; she does not know I let them out. That's how I know she was crying, 'cos I was hiding in the press. And 'Lizabeth came into the kitchen and said, 'You're a *faifful* soul, Mary. You take a day off and stay as long as you like!' Why was it faifful of her to cry, Edward?"

"I think she was crying because someone she was fond of had died, my dear. Now, will you give Pandora this box for me?" He took from the car a square, ivory box clamped with silver, and locked.

"This is the key," he said. "See, I'll stick it in the lock in case you lose it!" He placed the box in the child's arms. "It's not too heavy?" he added kindly.

"Not a mite; but it's got fings in it. I hear them rattle. D'you fink it might be precious stones?"

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"There's no saying. We live in a world of wonders where the unexpected still happens, don't we? There! Just take it to her like a good kid, and tell her she forgot it last night——"

"Shall I tell her who brought it?" asked Betty, somewhat offended at being called a kid after so much grown-up conversation.

"Oh, she'll guess that for herself! But—yes, you may if you like, and tell her—tell her I hope to see her soon!"

He raised his cap—a salute to which Betty responded with a graciously dignified bow, and, as he drove away, she turned and walked to the house, bearing the box in her arms. It was heavy, and her dignified walk had become something very like a stagger by the time she entered the kitchen, guided thereto by the pleasant smell of cooking, where Pandora was at work.

Pandora had one of Mary's big aprons pinned on over her black dress. A dab of flour ornamented the middle of her forehead, and one black lock, which would persist in falling forward, had become whitened with repeated pushing it back into place. Her cheeks were flushed with exertion, and her eyes shone sombrely.

"Lovey! Where have you been?" she greeted the little girl. "I've made a lovely dumpling with raisins in it for dinner. You might have helped me to seed them. There's mince too. Lift the lid of the pot gently and look in and see if it's doing. Don't burn your fingers—— Mercy me, child!" she broke off, her face changing swiftly as she recognized the box in Betty's arm. "Where in the world did you get that?"

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Betty laid it down on the table and breathed a sigh of relief.

"You may say it's heavy, dear!" she said, still with her grown-up air. "I'm perfectly rejoiced about the dumpling. Mary does make them so seldom. And I would have helped with the raisins if I'd guessed, specially as you are so sweet about letting one taste; but to tell the *truth* I guessed it would only be rice, so I stopped down at the gate just to keep my eye on the passers-by, and Edward came along, and after some talk togever he said to give you this box with the message that you had forgotten it last night, and he was sorry he couldn't stay to lunch, as he was busy and didn't want any, and he'd hope to come in another day soon. And the key's in the lock!"

Pandora's colour had risen and faded again during this long speech of Betty's. A sort of unwilling and dreadful fascination drew her eyes to the box.

"I wonder so what can be in it!" speculated Betty who was disappointed that Pandora did not fall upon it and open it on the spot. "Edward said he rather wouldn't be surprised if it was jewels, as this is a world of wonders," she added wistfully. "Fancy, if there was a little diamond mouse, dear, with ruby eyes and emerald whiskers, and little claws of—of——"

"Fancy something sensible for a change!" broke in Pandora cruelly. "If there were jewels, my child, you may bet your life they would go straight back where they came from. And now go away and wash your hands and smooth your front hair and pull up your socks, and by that time dinner will be ready. Oh, and call

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Aunt Tabitha while you are about it. She may be asleep in Elizabeth's study."

Betty departed reluctantly, and Pandora turned her back on the box and began to dish up. But her serenity was gone. The memory of last night came back to her with full force, and things seemed more unreal and dreadful than ever.

When Betty came back she was quite overjoyed to find that Pandora, absorbed in melancholy reflections, had dished up the dumpling and forgotten the mince.

"Oh, darling! Let's have pudding first and meat after!" she said in a whisper of ecstacy. "We might pretend we were besieged people and eating any old thing we could get hold of," she urged. "If that was the case, Dora, easily we might be living only on dumplings!"

"Easily we might!" agreed Pandora. "Find some plates, child! Actually, I forgot potatoes!"

"Then, dear, let's have cookies! And wouldn't ginger ale be splendid? We might pretend the enemy had fallen to sleep at their posts, and we had stolen out and found bottles of rich wine lying in their midst!"

Pandora nodded silently. The way of least resistence commended itself to her to-day. Betty might have anything she liked so long as she (Pandora) need not worry about it.

"Is Daddy likely to be back?" she asked when she had passed the child her plateful of pudding.

"There you have me, darling!" said Betty, carefully picking out raisins and laying them on one side of the plate for future consumption. "Goodness only knows when he'll be back. I 'magine not till late, though I

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haven't an idea where he's gone—not with Mummy, or I'd have seen him start; not——"

"Well, never mind; it doesn't really matter where he has gone."

"Dora! might I ask one smallest question, then I won't tease you wif another till tea-time. Not even about the box, though I'm fearfully dying to know what's in it."

"Go on!" said Pandora. "I may as well warn you, Betty, that I am not going to tell you anything about the box at all. It's a thing that concerns nobody but myself——"

"Oh, very well!" returned Betty, mortally offended. "The question is, why does Daddy not like you?"

Pandora flushed suddenly and violently red. She made a little gasping noise as if she were choking, and pushing back her chair, remained staring at Betty for a moment without speaking.

"How do you know he doesn't?" she breathed at last.

Betty, terribly concerned at the effect on her dear Pandora of her innocent question, left her raisins and went gently round to Pandora's chair and slipped a small brown arm round her neck. "It's not worf worrying about, darling," she said consolingly. "Men have such curious tastes! You wouldn't believe. Mary says they are past praying for, and she ought to know. She's seen enough, she always says!"

"What made you say such a thing? You shouldn't think about such things, or know about them——"

"Well, I heard Mummy say to him, 'You always go out when Dora comes here; I think it's rather unkind,' and he didn't answer a word, but he kissed Mummy and

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went out. They didn't know I was in the room, but I was—hiding under the table pretending to be a lion."

She had the air of finding life hard as she walked back to her place and finished her pudding in silence. This done, she rose up and eyed Pandora with the air of an offended archangel. "I'll speak to Daddy myself about it," she said.

"If you do, I'll box your ears!" Pandora cried passionately. "As though things weren't absolutely unbearable as it is without you prying and spying and asking your interminable questions. You horrid little girl!"

She sprang up and hurried out of the room, leaving Betty scared and trembling.

"I do call myself a most unlucky child," she remarked to herself as two tears rolled down her cheeks, and she regarded the remains of the dumpling with mournful eyes.

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CHAPTER XVIII

PANDORA took the ivory box up to the room that was always set aside for her use at The Knowe, and locked the door. To further guard against intrusion she dragged up an armchair against it. Then she opened the box in fear and trembling. To her relief, she found that it was heavy merely because it was lined with thick solid silver. It contained nothing but a few letters tied together with black ribbon, a long blue folded sheet of paper, upon which was inscribed "My Will," a few faded flowers that fell to pieces as she touched them, and an old-fashioned ring quaintly set with stones of no particular value.

She sat for a few moments with the letters in her hand. She wanted to burn them, but the sure conviction that they contained the vital knowledge that she dreaded to know was a temptation strong enough to restrain her. Presently, with a quick gesture, she tore the ribbon off.

There were only three letters, and they were all addressed to Mrs. Miles in the same thin, precise handwriting, which seemed, somehow, to be not altogether unfamiliar to Pandora. After a moment, she remembered where she had seen it before—it was on the cheque which she had given to Elizabeth two days ago.

She took the first letter from its envelope and scanned

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it hurriedly. It was dated a year back, began "Dear Mrs. Miles," and ended "Yours faithfully, J. Fanshawe." It contained purely business matters, in which Pandora took not the slightest interest, and which she only imperfectly understood. She gathered, however, that the letter had been written at the time of Mrs. Miles' coming to live at Fairview, when she had put her business affairs in the hands of the lawyer, who, it would appear, had not been enthusiastic about accepting it.

The second letter was of a later date—had, in fact, been written only a month ago, and bore Mr. Fanshawe's home, instead of his office, address. The tone of this communication was more familiar; it was not about business, but Pandora found it even more bewildering than the first.

"DEAR CYNTHIA (she read)—

"Your letter would have left me in some doubt as to your sanity (if you will pardon very plain speaking) were it not for the fact that from first to last your behaviour has been characterized by the consistency of your indiscretions. Of course, I have guessed from the beginning what has brought you here, to St. Brides; nevertheless I hoped, until to-day, that I might be wrong. I may say that I am very far from understanding your motives, and that I consider what you propose to do inconsiderate and stupid to a degree.

"As for 'the line I propose to pursue'—

"My dear friend, I propose to continue in the straight line in which I have been here progressing for fifteen years. And however greatly the contents of your letter may have disturbed me, I fancy they are not sufficient

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to cause me to change my mind in that respect—or in any other in which I am determined.

"Yours faithfully,

"J. FANSHAWE."

The next letter bore the date of only two days ago, and was typewritten from Fanshawe's office:

"DEAR CYNTHIA (it ran)—

"If my word, as that of an old friend, has any weight with you whatsoever, I do beg of you to be discreet. Why you should harbour this absurd idea that you have not long to live, I cannot imagine. On the contrary, I am convinced that you yet have many years before you in which to repent of any false step you may take now. I can't too strongly urge upon you to keep silence. You cannot pretend even to yourself that the girl is anything to you after all these years! To lay claim to maternal sentiment now is futile and absurd, and can only bring ruin and distress—perhaps to her—certainly to yourself, and possibly to a man who, to put it mildly, had paternity thrust upon him very much against his will, and who—I feel assured—would most certainly repudiate any claims or accusations you might make against him at this date. Into that question, however, we have already gone pretty thoroughly, and I think you understand that the girl's father is determined on that point, the more so in that he is satisfied that you have no proof whatsoever of his former relationship with you or of his paternity to your child.

"Nevertheless, though you have no legal rights on your side, I am writing this letter to beg you to see

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reason. If the child's parents have not wanted her during all these years, why, in God's name, should you expect *her* to welcome *them* now? Leave her your property, bind her to you by branding her and yourself publicly at your death, by all means, if such a proceeding is a salve to your conscience. But I do not hesitate to express my opinion that in doing so you will make an unforgivable mistake. She is well provided for, in good hands, and about to marry a good, honest man, who will see to it that she doesn't stray from the straight and narrow path as you did, with unfortunate results.

"One more point—forgive my mentioning it—but it would be advisable not to come to my office again after business hours to discuss these or other matters.

"Yours faithfully,

"J. FANSHAWE."

Pandora folded the letter and returned it to its envelope with a hand that trembled.

"The cad!" she said. "The contemptible cad! Edward was right. One ought not to have anything to do with such a man. I won't paint his picture! I'll pay him back his horrible money if I have to save every farthing to do it!"

She wished heartily that she had never spoken to him, never let him cross her threshold. The memory of his cynical, mocking face filled her with a perfect fury of rage against the cruel infamous way in which he had spoken of her—mocking at her illegitimacy. At all costs, her parentage must be kept secret—not for her sake at all. She saw quite well that there was really no question of her interest in the matter, but for the sake of the woman who had abandoned her, and, most of all,

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for the sake of this unknown father who was prepared at all costs to deny her. From her anger sprang an idea that was all at once a resolution. At all costs she would know the name of this man who had "paternity thrust upon him." She was actuated by no desire to claim him or to force him to claim her. But at least he should acknowledge her right to the truth.

She took the letters and the will and pinned on her hat. Her first idea was to go straight to Fanshawe's office and confront him with them and force the truth from him. Her second was to go first to Edward and ask him to come with her, for the thought of confronting the lawyer alone filled her with disgust and even fear. Moreover, she longed for the comforting support of Edward's presence. However unkind she might be to him, it never even occurred to her that he could be otherwise than good and kind to her—especially now that she was lonely and desolate and unhappy. Yes, she would go first to Edward.

She unlocked her door and went downstairs. She came on Betty and Aunt Tabitha sitting together on the oak chest in the hall. Aunt Tabitha was evidently in a mood, and Betty raised anxious, dark eyes to Pandora as she came towards them.

"I'm trying my best to humour her, Dora," she said in a despairing whisper. "But she will have it that I've run away from the convent, and she's so 'noyed wif me. And to make matters worse she's tore her mits off and frown them on the ground, and now Silas is worrying them in the geraniums."

"Never mind, darling!" said Pandora, speaking all the more gently because she felt strung up to breaking

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point herself. "How I do wish Mary wouldn't go out and leave us to cope with her ourselves!"

"Quite usually I manage her pretty well!" mourned the little girl. "But she's in one of her moods to-day, when she will call me *Cynfia*, and I *do* hate it!"

"I don't wonder!" returned Pandora with restrained bitterness; "it's an odious name! Aunt Tabitha!" she said, looking at the old woman and trying to overcome her repugnance sufficiently to speak gently; "do go to your room and try to sleep for a little while, and then you shall have tea!"

"Oh, it's you, is it?" snapped Aunt Tabitha, turning on Pandora with sharp vindictiveness. She looked her up and down with malevolence in her beady eyes, mumbling and mouthing to herself the while. Then she rose to her feet, and gathering her silk shawl round her shoulders, advanced with a mincing, dancing step to the stairs.

She began to mount them, leaning heavily on the banisters, but on the third step she stopped and turned round, whimpering:

"Where's John? I must lean on his arm!"

"She confounds Daddy with John, always now," said Betty hopelessly. She hurried forward. "You take my hand, Aunt Tab!" she said anxiously; "I'll help you. John's gone to get you a box of chocolates!"

"Betty, she is too much for you!" cried Pandora anxiously. But her voice was undecided, her step more so as she followed Betty. She longed to get away out of sight of the old woman, upon whom she could not now look without a shudder, yet she disliked the thought of leaving poor Betty to manage her alone.

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But there were few occasions to which Elizabeth's child was not equal. Besides, she was so happy at finding herself reinstated in Pandora's good graces that no trouble seemed too great to take if it only made Dora look on her with the respect that was her due again.

"Don't worry, dear!" she said. "I believe I manage her best. I'll get her to lie down, and I 'spect Daddy'll be back in half a tick or so!"

Pandora was not used to demonstrations of affection, but something moved her to bend down and kiss the little earnest face upturned to hers. "You are a love!" she said, "and I am sorry I called you prying and spying. You are not. You are a darling, dirty angel —your face is *so* sticky! Goodbye!"

The echo of Betty's thrilling, delighted voice whispering, "Darling, *dear* Dora!" and the pressure of her arms flung round her neck, brought tears to her eyes, and the memory of them went with her all the way down the hill, right to the door of Edward's house in Abbey Street.

The door was shut. She rang the bell, and presently the detested Mrs. Smiley answered it.

It was very likely her imagination, but she certainly fancied that the woman eyed her less civilly than usual when she asked for Dr. Rattray.

"He's out, miss!" she said shortly, and added with bare civility, "Was you expecting him to be in, Miss Pandora?"

"I fancy that scarcely concerns you, Mrs. Smiley— but perhaps you can tell me where he has gone to and when he will be back."

"He didn't tell me, miss, when he'd be back," re-

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turned the housekeeper sullenly, "and as to where he's gone, p'raps you'd say that don't concern me either, miss."

"But it happens to concern me, and I'll thank you to tell me, or else I shall certainly complain of your impertinence to Dr. Rattray when I see him——"

"Oh, very well, miss," said Mrs. Smiley, blinking her pale eyes rapidly and breathing hard. Perhaps, after all, she had been misinformed by Mary Ann over the way, who had been so positive that Mr. Edward and Miss Pandora had had a terrible row, and that all was over between them. It was perhaps still necessary to be a little careful with Miss Pandora, whom she would gladly have seen humiliated and scorned by Mr. Edward. "Very well, miss," she repeated; "I only act for the best. Mr. Edward, he said nothing to me but 'I won't be in to dinner, Mrs. Smiley,' says he, 'nor yet to tea.' And then out he goes, him and Miss Kate Wilbur together——"

"Miss Wilbur?"

"Yes," returned the housekeeper, quick to perceive that this piece of information at least was unwelcome. Not that Pandora showed the slightest emotion at the news, but Mrs. Smiley, possessed of the secret knowledge of which the trusted servant is usually able to possess herself, could easily make a guess at the rage and jealousy which her words must be causing Miss Pandora. She knew these young ladies, for all they pretended to be friendly together, they were ready to scratch each other's eyes out for Mr. Edward. She hated them all, but Pandora more than any of them.

"Yes," she repeated, "Miss Kate. She came over at

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two o'clock with a note from her ma. And the doors being wide, and them talking unreserved like, what I gathered was that miss was wanting him for a game at golf, and he was to go back and stop to dinner with them at Cliff End, for 'don't dress' was what I heard miss say to him, and glad enough to go, he seemed, and off they set together, him laughing and talking, pleasant-like as is his way, and carrying his clubs. And that's every word I can tell you, miss, and not another. Will I tell him you called?"

"As you please, but I shall ring him up myself."

Pandora turned and walked away. She felt more lonely than ever. Not exactly angry with Edward, rather she was disappointed and humiliated—utterly unreasonable though it was that she should have any such feelings about the matter at all.

"If he had cared, he could not have gone off with Kate now, to-day of all days, when he might have known I should want him!" she said to herself. That she had treated him badly, even with wanton cruelty, was nothing now weighed against the fact that she wanted his help and comfort.

It was only a few minutes' walk to Mr. Fanshawe's office, and presently she was there. She mounted the short flight of steps to the door and rang the bell, and in a few moments was shown by an office-boy into a very comfortably furnished room, where Mr. Fanshawe, looking as bland and cynical as ever, was smoking a cigarette at a desk with the afternoon paper in his hands.

When Pandora entered the room he rose slowly to his feet; the expression of his face scarcely altered, though

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his eyes narrowed to a hard intent look: "Good-day, Miss Pandora!" he said suavely.

To be called "Miss Pandora" by him now was all at once an insult, and she, already half-way out to meet insults, flushed deeply. She would have liked to forbid him, then and there, ever to use her Christian name again, but she realized the importance of keeping her temper well in hand, and forced herself to answer his greeting with a show of politeness.

He, apparently, noticed nothing out of the ordinary in her manner. "I imagine I know what you have come to see me about this afternoon," he went on, drawing up a chair for her.

"What?" she demanded bluntly.

"Why, that portrait of mine, my dear! I went round to your flat as arranged and found you had gone. The young woman in hair-curlers whom I found in possession informed me that you were at The Knowe, and added that I might ring you up if I wanted to speak to you. However, I refrained. Of course, it is nothing to me that you should make an appointment and fail to keep it. The *dis*appointment is all that matters, and so, to avoid a repetition of it, I am leaving it to you to fix the time most convenient to yourself for the next occasion!"

Pandora glanced at him with aversion. Jocular, he seemed to her even more unpleasing than when he was his ordinary, cynical self. Had she been less intent upon her own thoughts and feelings it might have struck her that his jocularity was assumed. All the time he was speaking he was engaged in polishing his eyeglass, yet he watched her closely the while from

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beneath lowered eyelids. His teeth had closed over his underlip, giving him a calculating, furtive look. She, however, noticed nothing, and went on blindly, aware only that her throat and mouth felt dry, and that her heart was beating against her ribs like a hammer.

"No time is convenient to me," she said in a hard unmodulated voice, "because I have altogether changed my mind. I am not going to make a sketch of you at all."

He paused before he answered her, moistening his lips with the tip of his tongue. Then: "And, if I may ask, why not, when I have already paid you for the portrait?"

"You shall have the money back. It is true it is spent now—the £30 you gave me. I wish I had never taken it; from the bottom of my soul I do! But you shall have it back, with a hundred per cent. interest if you like. I have money of my own. I'll go to Mr. Martin at the Bank now, straight away, and see about it."

He waved all these propositions aside as merely silly and not to be entertained seriously.

"But all this does not tell me what has happened since the day before yesterday to make you change your mind," he objected, watching her as closely as a cat watches a mouse.

"What has happened since the day before yesterday?" cried Pandora, her usually low voice rising shrilly as she confronted him: "Do you dare to ask me that? Mrs. Miles is dead—and that has made me change my mind!"

She paused and took from a little black silk bag on

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her wrist the letters and the will, all of which she laid upon the table; "and these have made me change my mind!" She pushed them towards him. "You may read them if you like, if you have forgotten the horrible things you said in them!"

His face had flushed a dull red. How hideous he looked! How repulsive! "An outrage on humanity!" Elizabeth had once called him, and Elizabeth was right.

She watched him pick up the letters, and saw a look of anger, yet of relief, too, come into his eyes.

"Oh, these!" he said contemptuously, and glanced over them before he tore them across and across and flung them into the waste-paper basket. "However discreetly you may write to a woman you can never be discreet enough. She always keeps the letters!" he remarked. "But there's an end of them now! So she told you! I was afraid she would. She always was a fool. And now, why have you come to me about it?"

"Don't dare to speak of her like that to me!" flashed out Pandora.

He gave a short laugh, and came a step nearer to her.

"You have some reason for it," he said softly. "Perhaps there is something you want to know; something you want me to tell you? Well, don't you think you are taking the wrong way as a means to gain your end?"

The still evenness of his voice filled her with a secret dread, but she would have died sooner than betray it to those sinister eyes that watched her. . . . She had a horrible feeling that the knowledge of all evil lay behind those eyes. What had he to do with the dead

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woman and her past? He must be a very great friend of her father to so strongly desire that his secret should be kept! She began now to doubt if all her powers of persuasion could prevail upon him to tell her what at all costs she must know. She summoned all her resolution.

"I want you to tell me who my father is," she said very quietly.

"And why, pray? What good will it do you? He'll not acknowledge you. You have nothing to gain and everything to lose by trying to find out what it is infinitely better you should not know."

"You don't understand," said Pandora, controlling her temper with an immense effort, because to lose it at this juncture were to lose everything. "It is not a question of gain at all. I want to know—I must know—who I am. That is all. Listen! Will this convince you of how *truly* I want nothing else?" she pleaded insistently: "Mrs. Miles has left me everything—all her money and her house and her jewelry. But I am not going to take it. I would rather die in a ditch ten times over than touch a farthing of it. There's the will! Keep it, or burn it for all the good it will ever do me! He may have it all!"

"He? Whom do you mean?"

"The man who is my father, of course!"

He watched her quite unmoved. "But he has no more claim on it than the man in the street. If you don't take it, it will go to Elizabeth Seaton after the old woman is dead. You had better think twice about it."

"I won't think about it at all! Let Elizabeth have

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it—it's all one to me! Won't you tell me who my father is?"

He watched her curiously for a minute before he answered. Then, "Sit down," he said softly, "and tell me why it should seem so important to you to know."

She walked to the window—she could not have sat still in his presence—and stood looking out into the street with unseeing eyes. It hurt her to confide in this man, who would neither sympathize nor understand, but would only stare at her with his sinister watching eyes as if she were something new and hitherto undreamt of in his philosophy. But there was nothing else for it. She turned round facing him desperately.

"Oh, can't you see," she cried, "that it is my self-respect that I want? I don't want his money. I don't want to be acknowledged. I don't want him to be fond of me. I'd sooner he wasn't. . . . But, all my life, I have lived in the belief that my father was a Spanish noble, perhaps even a Prince, forbidden by the King to marry my mother. If I knew for certain that that was the case," she went on piteously, "I'd get back my self-respect. I shouldn't feel so desolate; but now —now everything seems so *different*, and so unreal, so cruel and horrible, and I am in such hideous uncertainty. You must know who he is—won't you tell me? Only his name, and where he is. I'll never try to claim him. I'll never even want to see him or speak to him. I only want to be proud of him! I only want to be proud of myself again!"

She broke off suddenly and turned to the window again, struggling with herself to keep back the tears.

For a few minutes Fanshawe did not speak or move,

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then, very slowly and softly, but with a deliberation that had in it something horrible, he followed her and possessed himself of her hand.

She turned swiftly and tore it from his grasp; all her dislike and dread of him revealed there in her face for him to see.

He drew away from her a pace or two, moistening his dry lips with his tongue; but he affected not to see her agitation.

"So you want to know the secret as much as all that!" he said. "I am sorry, for I would rather not have told you!"

"But you *will* tell me?" she pressed him eagerly; "I know you will not be so cruel as to refuse! If you only knew——!"

He put up his hand to restrain her.

"My dear Miss Pandora," he said; "it is part of my business to know—more than you think! As for this matter, you shall decide for yourself presently whether you will hear it or not."

"Oh, thank you! Thank you so much! Indeed I am grateful! Please tell me at once. Surely there is no need to decide anything further?"

Again he cut her short; not exactly with impatience, but as though he found her protestations rather beside the point.

"As a preliminary, my dear, it would make me a good deal more comfortable if you would consent to take a chair. Our interview won't be over in five minutes, and I can't have you tire yourself."

Pandora, who hardly knew what it meant to be tired, sank into a chair with a little gesture of impatience;

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anything to get the interview over; to learn what she wanted, and to be away from this man whose presence oppressed her with foreboding and dread. She raised her eyes to his face, but the expression that she saw there made her look away again quickly.

"Please tell me!" she said nervously.

"Ah, yes! I suppose you don't realize, however, that it is a question of honour with me to keep your father's name a secret?"

So she was up against a man's sense of honour! How tiresome! How sickening! But surely it should not be very difficult to over-rule Mr. Fanshawe's scruples if all she had heard about him were true. She must just try to be more persuasive than ever, and more patient, and shut her eyes to the fact that she was already more than half wishing that she had not come. Besides, the thought of going away with her object still unattained was not to be endured; Pandora was never one to turn back half-way.

"You mean you promised him you would not tell?" she asked, leaning rather towards him, her dark eyes tense with entreaty. "But, after all, does that matter? Surely, twenty-three years is enough to upset a little thing like a promise? Besides, things have changed since then. *Worlds* lie between! I don't suppose he ever thought—ever dreamed—that one day it would make the difference between peace of mind and wretchedness to me to know. It wouldn't have mattered if *she* had kept the secret too, but, you see, she hasn't. She should never have given me your letters to read. She should never have told me that she was my mother if I was not to know more. It was cruel of her—

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wicked——!" Her voice choked with indignation and she stopped abruptly, unaware that tears of passionate entreaty were in her eyes, making her look more beautiful than ever.

Fanshawe regarded her with appreciation as he answered her.

"It was excessively foolish of her, I admit," he said; "but she took up the line of conduct that one might have foreseen."

"You knew her well, then, too?" pressed Pandora.

He came a step nearer and put his hand on the back of her chair. She made a little uneasy movement, but she could not shake him off. She dared not—not until she knew more. But all Elizabeth's warnings recurred to her at that moment with an ominous meaning.

She had laughed at the time, secure in the belief in her own ability to cope with Fanshawe or any man, and in any situation. She was not quite so sure of herself now.

"Oh, dear me, yes!" he was saying in a smooth intimate voice; "I knew her very well indeed. When she was younger than you are now, Miss Pandora, I knew her. She was as romantic as you are, and as headstrong—even more impulsive——"

"How do you know that I am romantic or headstrong or impulsive?" demanded Pandora haughtily, yet unable as usual to avoid a conversation that turned upon herself.

Fanshawe smiled. He looked dreadfully sinister when he smiled, Pandora thought. "All beautiful women are romantic," he silenced her by replying; "and they inspire romantic feelings in others."

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"Please go on with what you were telling me," she said.

"About Mrs. Miles? Believe me, my dear Miss Pandora, it was only in late years that she grew worldly. Circumstances made her so. Made her cynical and hard, as they may make you. Nothing could ever make her consistently prudent, however," he added after a pause.

"I am hard, already, and cynical," remarked Pandora, some instinct making her want to appear in as bad a light as possible in the eyes of Mr. Fanshawe. "No circumstances are needed to change me."

He merely gave a little laugh. "We are coming to that presently, my dear young lady," he said. "In the meantime I am leading up to the information you desire by explaining to you Cynthia—I may continue to call her Cynthia, by the way?"

"Call her anything you like!" cried Pandora, scarcely able to control her weariness and impatience. "But I don't really want to know about her at all. It's about the other——"

"Ah! Well, he was my friend, too. As a matter of fact it was I who introduced him to her. Does it hurt you to hear that?"

"Why should it hurt me? Nothing about her can hurt me now." But she tried to edge away from him further still. How odious he was—altogether horrible! "Go on," she said.

"I soon came to regret having done so on my own account. However, I helped them! I was in their confidence, and mighty anxious they both were to keep the whole affair secret. She as much as he, in those

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days. He——" He paused again, and looked at Pandora deliberately.

"Go on!" she breathed; "you were saying——!"

"Yes, he treated her damned badly, I will say, and as I was the onlooker I saw most of what took place. . . . I was in Seville, my dear Miss Pandora, when you were born. . . ." Once more the exasperating smooth voice ceased just at the critical point. Pandora, very white, clasped her hands tightly together, and, leaning forward, entreated him with her eyes. In another moment she must know—surely she must know!

"Of course, there were excuses for him. She was the sort to try the patience of a saint. Beautiful—yes, but nothing becomes more boring than beauty if it is not backed by brains; and, à propos, you must allow me to congratulate you, young lady; the gods have dealt more kindly with you, unless I am much mistaken——"

With a stifled exclamation of anger and impatience Pandora half rose from her seat, but he went on, unheeding the interruption.

"She had learned what they taught girls in convents in those days, and she was slow to pick up anything that might have helped her to keep a man once she had caught him; and anyone would have got bored with her whims and fancies. Besides, she was hysterical. As for him——"

"Yes? Why do you stop? It is about him that I want to hear. Not about her——"

"But to explain her excuses him, and that is what you want, isn't it? He was an ordinary man. He had no temperament. Before you were born, my dear, he had begun to thank whatever gods he had that he had

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omitted to tie himself to her for life. It is important to remember, Miss Pandora, that it is the man who tires first in a game of that sort. As the man slackens his grasp the woman tightens hers; but that's no good if she doesn't wear the plain gold ring. When 'tout lasse' it is the law that holds him. Nothing else can. Cynthia found that out, to her regret, but to the furtherance of her worldly wisdom."

"How cruel he must have been! Wicked!"

Fanshawe shrugged his shoulders. "Possibly, my dear; but that is Life, and Life is seldom kind to fools, even should they be young and beautiful. So they separated. After that, her conduct in regard to you shows her up for what she was—a woman with no heart, but with a mass of sentiments. Moreover, you never could tell where you had Cynthia. She could not keep away from her own mistakes. Hence her coming to settle here at St. Brides. I told her the first time I met her, walking down Abbey Street with that arrogant air of hers, that she was tempting Providence. She only laughed, but I knew what had brought her; for of course I have known who you were all along, Miss Pandora. You see, you happen to take after your father, and his appearance was somewhat out of the ordinary. So the mystery that surrounds you has never baffled me. An added piquancy—that is all!"

His manner of paying compliments was a thing only to be tolerated if by doing so some aim was to be gained. Pandora kept silence.

"Yes, morbid curiosity brought her here," he went on; "nothing else. She did not want you. She made no effort to cultivate your acquaintance. The very reverse,

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so I understand. You were the living, the unconscious witness to a past that was dead, and, whether she was sorry for it or not, she never would have dreamed of repairing the wrong she had done you had she not known that she was dying, and let herself be submerged by a wave of sentiment in consequence."

Pandora gazed at him miserably. It seemed to her as if, with his thin smiling lips and sinister eyes, he were the embodiment of all the evil and unhappiness he described. A sense of the utter futility of her errand overcame her. What was the good of questioning him any further? It was plain that he had nothing to tell her that it could make her happier to hear.

She got up slowly. She felt exhausted. Her face had an unnatural pallor that was accentuated by the heavy mournfulness of her eyes.

Fanshawe straightened himself. "Why, you are not going?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, I am!" cried Pandora; "I am sick of it all! I wish I had never come to you. I came in the hopes that you could tell me something to make me happier—to make me regain my self-respect. But you haven't—you won't! I am more miserable than ever. With every word you utter I sink deeper and deeper. I came, believing that in spite of everything there must be some redeeming feature, something noble in their love. But evidently there was not. It was only a common intrigue after all——" She broke off abruptly, unable to hide her mortification and distress.

He came a step nearer. "Not altogether that!" he said in a slow soft voice.

She turned, arrested by his words.

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"What do you mean?"

"I have not yet told you who he is."

"Then tell me and let me go!"

"Miss Pandora——" He paused and moistened his lips with the tip of his tongue, and gave a little thin laugh—the laugh that Pandora hated. "You have heard, I have no doubt, that every man has his price?"

She stared at him, a growing distrust in her eyes.

He cleared his throat and went on: "I certainly am not above the weakness of having mine. Years ago—so many that time might free me from my promise if nothing else does—I promised two people that I would keep their secret. Of these, the woman is dead; and, of the man—— I will tell you all you ask—if you wish it."

"Haven't I told you, and told you, and *told* you that I wish it!"

"Then you shall know it on the day you are my wife——"

She stepped back from him and remained staring at him; an uncomprehending blank stare almost as though her wits had deserted her. He waited a moment for her to speak, but as she did not do so he moved slowly, tentatively nearer to her; he put out his hands to touch her, but she sprang away from him, and stood at the other side of his desk, her eyes dark with anger and fear.

"Don't you touch me," she said in a low breathless voice; "that would be the last straw!"

Oh, how right Elizabeth had been; how right! What she had dimly felt ever since she had entered this room had come to pass. He did want something, and this was it!

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He gave his little thin laugh and put his hands in his pockets, just glanced at the door as though for a moment he had contemplated locking it; then shrugged his shoulders with an affectation of indifference, and said:

"I fail to see why my proposal should strike you as such a preposterous one, Miss Pandora. It is honest enough at all events."

Pandora shuddered, fascinated by his ugliness, by the repellant picture his words had conjured up. "Let me go!" she said huskily; "I ought never to have come here. I am sorry that I did——" She made a step towards the door, but with only the slightest movement he barred the way.

"Wait!" he said authoritatively; "you have not heard me out yet—possibly you may yet change your mind. For the moment you no longer wish to hear about your father—I see that. You only want to get away, to be out of my sight. Very well; presently you shall go—and think this over. Does it not occur to you that what I offer you is perhaps a refuge?"

"A refuge? I don't understand." Pandora was white now to the lips.

"I mean, of course, from the fate that overtook Mrs. Miles—your mother. Come, my dear, be sensible, and believe me, I know a great deal more than you have any idea of. It is my business to know things, and I do my business thoroughly. You are not going to marry Edward Rattray—and why? The answer to that question lies in the charcoal drawing of——"

Pandora broke in violently: "Don't dare to mention

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his name! Don't dare to say—to think such things! Oh, you are horrible! Contemptible!"

"The person who states unpleasant truths may be horrible, but is by no means contemptible. Listen! Roger Seaton is beyond your grasp. You can't have him. Edward you don't want. Besides, it wouldn't do. He would never be content unless you gave him all, and you would give him nothing. Remains me. No, don't speak, my dear. Hear me out, and then I'll let you go home to think about it. I don't want your love. I'd have no use for it. I can't give you mine—the springs of it ran dry many a year ago. So we should be well matched there, anyway. What you want you can't get, so you take my advice and be content with the next best thing—a man who will look after you and give you pocket-money and a good time; a respectable position in society, and a name that no one can look askance at. What *I* want is a beautiful wife to be agreeable to my friends, so that they can say, 'A lucky dog, that!' I have a great many beautiful things in my house, Pandora, but you would be the most beautiful of the lot. And I would be kind to you; you could paint your pictures. Oh yes, I would be kind to you and give you all the things that a beautiful girl ought to have to make her beauty a thing to stare at—jewels and furs, whatever you care for most."

Pandora heard him out with a sort of startled, curious aversion, and with every word he uttered her horror of him increased. She edged away from him further and further. "How dare you say such things? How dare you think them?" she stammered. "You are wrong about me, altogether wrong. Haven't I said enough

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already to prove to you that I care nothing for money —or jewels, or for a respectable position? Those things that you value highly mean nothing to me. I don't want them; I only want what you can never give me——"

She broke off, bitterly ashamed and humiliated; she wished to God that she had never let this man see into her heart. How had it happened? She could not tell, but it seemed that he had probed to the innermost recesses, and his searching eyes had read there her dearest secret. His persuasive voice tortured her.

"As for how I dare think such things—why not, my dear? Youth and beauty do not only attract the young and the brave. Often, on the contrary, they are most appreciated by those of—shall we say, riper years? I have admired you from a distance ever since you came home from Paris. My admiration crystallized into the intention to marry you on the day that—acting on your own suggestion, remember—I followed you back to your studio from the concert. . . ."

As he uttered these words he came nearer, and his tone changed; the cajoling flattery left it and revealed a half-veiled threat. In his eyes by that act Pandora had compromised herself hopelessly.

But in showing that he thought so he had made a false step. More than thirty years lay between him and Pandora, and she belonged to a different school of thought altogether. Whether she had compromised herself or not did not concern her in the least. What did it amount to, anyway? The gossip of the people of St. Brides—a matter that had never disturbed her equanimity in the least. It was certainly not going to

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force her into matrimony with Mr. Fanshawe. However, this sort of thing was easier to answer by far than his pleasantries. These made her afraid.

"Don't say anything more!" she said in a low, passionate voice. "Can nothing make you understand that every word you say to me is odious? Did you *really* think that I wanted you to come to my studio for any but the reason I gave?"

He stared at her, his mouth dropping slightly open, amazed at her beauty. Her eyes were flashing, and her white cheeks were flushed to the colour of a wild rose. She was even more lovely than he had thought. If she were his wife he would often make her angry just for the pleasure of making her look like that. But she was not going to marry him—not she! Not yet, at all events! He scarcely heard what she was saying.

"All I wanted of you was £30. And I got it. Did you *really* think—imagine for one moment that I wanted your attentions? Oh, horrible! The idea of it's an insult! Whoever I am—no matter. Every word you have uttered to me has been an insult. I would not marry you, not if—— Oh!" she broke off choking with anger; "I'll have no more to do with you, or—or—my father. I am glad I don't know who he is! If he could entrust you with the secret of his life I had rather not know it. As for her—I am glad, yes, *glad* that she is dead, that she died when she told me who she was!"

With a sudden movement she snatched the will up from the table, tore it into pieces and flung it from her. "There's an end to it all!" she cried.

He watched her, quite unmoved by her wrath, his

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cynical mirthless smile twisting his lips. "That's very naughty," he said softly, "and very futile. If you had glanced at it first you might have seen that it is worthless—merely an idea in fact. I have the will here, in my keeping. You inherit at least £5,000 a year."

"Not a penny!" gasped Pandora.

"It belonged to old Miles, my dear. Don't you worry—not a penny did she get from the man, and neither will you, believe me! He has led a respectable life for twenty-three years now, and he is not like her; *he* won't revoke at the last minute on your account. That is why I am going to suggest that when we meet again this topic should not be touched upon between us."

"We shall never meet again. Never! Now let me go!"

He raised his eyebrows at the vehemence of her words, hesitated, just a moment, then stepping before her he opened the door and bowed her out, cynical and unruffled once more.

Only, when he had closed the door after her, he walked with quick light steps to the window, where he stood and watched her till she had passed out of sight up the street. An enigmatic smile touched the corners of his lips. But, after all, nothing in the interview had seriously disturbed him. Very soon he went back to his paper.

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CHAPTER XIX

PANDORA walked down the steps and into the street. She stood for a moment looking round her as though she were a stranger and uncertain of her direction. Then she walked up the street towards the old Cathedral. In the last hour the day had changed; the sun still shone, but it was dimmed by a haze that was creeping swiftly with a little shivering wind up from the sea. Pandora shivered in her thin dress.

At the top of the street she met Mrs. Muir, who was about to pass her with a cold bow, when her eyes fell upon the girl's tragic face and, to satisfy her curiosity, she stopped.

"Well, Miss Pandora!" she began, playfully severe; "I have a bone to pick with you—with all of you, in fact, up at The Knowe!"

Pandora stared at her uncomprehendingly and in a dazed way, almost as if she did not recognize her.

"Surely you knew that I asked you all to dinner last night?"

Last night! What worlds away was last night!

"No, I didn't know," faltered Pandora, looking round her for a way of escape. "Did it matter much?"

Mrs. Muir's podgy hand lay on her arm. "Oh, certainly not to me!" she replied stiffly. "I thought it might have been pleasant for you and the Seatons, that's

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all! Perhaps a means of bringing about a better understanding between you and one or two of the nicest people in St. Brides before your marriage. We were quite an informal party, got together on the spur of the moment. Kate Wilbur came, and two of the Mackenzie girls, and Mr. Fanshawe, and——"

"You are behind the times, Mrs. Muir," broke in Pandora with a cold smile. "I am not going to marry Edward at all. I have changed my mind!"

Even now, in the midst of her desolation she was able to abstract some amusement from the sight of Mrs. Muir's face as she stepped back heavily and stared at her with a round, open mouth which disclosed two long front teeth. Her breath came in a gasp.

"Changed your mind! You are not going to marry Edward—my sister's nephew!" she said in a dazed way. "Are you mad, Pandora? Such a chance is not likely to come your way every day of the week!"

"Perhaps I am mad, I really don't know," returned Pandora, giving the meek answer which by no means always turneth away wrath, and which in this case merely heaped fuel upon the fire of the old lady's anger.

"What are your reasons, may I ask?" she demanded.

"Oh, ask, certainly, if you care to, but I shall not satisfy your curiosity," returned Pandora in a listless tone, as though the subject had no interest for her. "I am only telling you the bare fact because it seemed the easiest and quickest way of getting the news about. I am going away—at once," she added as an afterthought.

"Away?" Mrs. Muir's voice rose with her astonishment to a painful shrillness. "Have you and Elizabeth

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quarrelled?" she asked eagerly. A sudden idea occurred to her, for she had believed the worst from the moment her maid had come to her with the story of having seen Captain Seaton kiss Pandora upon the St. Brides Hill. She put on her glasses and stared at the girl as if she would pierce to the inmost recesses of her mind and read its secrets.

What she discovered in the girl's white and suffering face may or may not have given her satisfaction. Before she had time to question her further, Pandora answered her with the same listless indifference.

"If you care to know it—no; we have not quarrelled. We have never quarrelled in our lives. I am going back to Paris to study art again, and to lead my own life out of the sight of prying eyes and away from inquisitive tongues. So goodbye, Mrs. Muir; I give you full leave to tell everyone whom it does not concern what version you please of the story. Tell them that I am mad and bad and damned utterly, if you like!"

And without another look at the scandalized lady she walked on, up the street.

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated Mrs. Muir in a solemn undertone. "It never would surprise me to have my worst suspicions about that girl confirmed—or to hear that she was locked up in a lunatic asylum. Let me see! I wonder whose 'At Home' day this is! Thursday—Mrs. Wilbur, of course! And I am in capital time still for a cup of tea."

Pandora did not stop till she had reached her own flat. As usual, she had forgotten her key; but, most unusual, Marianna was in, for she had conceived the notion of making rhubarb jam, and Pandora was

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assailed by a strong smell of burning sugar as the maid opened the door to her.

"Fancy you, miss!" she remarked affably. "Will I make you a cup o' tea? A gentleman called, and I said you was at The Knowe. That was soon after dinner-time."

Pandora cut her short and walked into the studio and looked listlessly around her. Elizabeth had forgotten the parcel of Betty's shoes which she had been taking up to Edinburgh to match, and they lay on the table where she had left them in the morning. From the easel, the unfinished Carmen faced her, smiling her hard, unreal smile—a failure, just as the girl half hidden by the poppies to hide the bad drawing of her naked limbs was a failure; and they all were failures, missing perfection or excellence by a hair's breadth; they lacked the indefinable something—the living touch, which is the soul of all true art. The single exception, the one study of them all which proved that she had it in her to rise to greater things, was the charcoal sketch of the man who with serious eyes looked down at her from the wall.

She gazed at this long and steadily till tears dimmed her gaze. Was it for the merit of this one picture that Fanshawe had paid her £30, or was it for some other reason, too abhorrent to be guessed at? Well, that she would never seek to know. She was done with Fanshawe now! If only the remembrance of his mocking cynical face would not rise so persistently before her, haunting her . . . reminding her that she was a failure too—a nobody—the daughter of a woman who had guarded her respectability so closely that she had not acknowledged her child till the hour of death, of a man

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whose very identity was a secret she might never learn. Gone, were her dreams! The poor princess of yesterday was of the commonest clay after all, with no halo of romance around her. She crouched over the empty fireplace, shivering. How cold it was! The window was wide open, and outside the street showed grey and damp with the chill of the misty night.

Long ago Marianna had gone home. Pandora had sent her away and told her not to come back that night, for she wanted to be alone and undisturbed; and where Marianna was, quiet could not remain. She had brought in tea first on a little tray, but Pandora had forgotten to drink it, and now it was cold and bitter. It did not occur to her to make more, but she ate a piece of bread and butter, and wasted half a box of matches in making the fire burn. This done, she crouched over the blaze—her feet and hands were like ice, but her head felt as if it were on fire. New ideas kept coming into it—ideas for pictures so great that could she but paint them as they should be painted her name would be made. Vast and splendid plans for her own future whirled through her brain. Yes, she would go away and study and become great; she would make a name for herself; and Roger. . . . But all the fame she could ever wrest from life would not be enough to make Roger love her!

Her fingers, clutching feverishly at the front of her dress, came in contact with the opal round her neck. She looked at it for a moment with dull eyes, reading again the inscription which had never before failed to fill her with a lofty sense of pride in her own destiny. It meant nothing to her now. She tore at it so roughly that a link in the chain snapped and she flung it across

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the room. Then she sprang up and went into her bedroom, pulled out her box and emptied the contents of her wardrobe and chest of drawers on to the bed, and began throwing them and huddling them into the box.

In the midst of this the bell rang. At first she paid no heed to it, but it seemed that whoever it was was not going away without an answer, so at last she went to the door and flung it open.

Roger stood on the step.

For a moment he stood, just looking at her, breathing rather quickly as if he were out of breath. With the shock of seeing him, all her senses seemed to concentrate in the one overwhelming desire just to keep him. Fear made her desperate lest he had come just to give some cold message from Elizabeth, and that he would go away again leaving her wounded with the terrible indifference with which he always met her overtures.

"Come in!" she whispered. "Please!" and she put out her hand.

He did not take it; he leaned one hand on the lintel of the doorway and spoke quickly. "I didn't mean to come in; it is late. I only wanted to ask you if it is true that you are going away. I met Mrs. Muir this evening——"

"Yes, it is true!" she said in a toneless voice. As she spoke she swayed towards him, the very intensity of her emotion making her feel faint and giddy.

In an instant he had stepped over the threshold and put his arm round her. "So!" he said with a little laugh, half bitter, half triumphant; "it has all been of no use, this struggle to keep away from you, to forget you. You have won, Pandora!"

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The key of the door was lying on the hall table, and he picked it up and stuck it in the outside before he closed it. "Now, if your maid comes back she need not disturb us by ringing," he said.

She scarcely heeded him; it seemed of no consequence or she might have told him that there was no fear of Marianna interrupting them at all, since she had gone home for the night. But nothing in the world seemed to matter; everything was blotted out by his nearness, by the passion in his eyes, by the trembling of his hands that clasped hers; above all, by the knowledge that he did not want her to go away.

He led her into the studio and shut the door. For a moment he stood with his back to it, just looking at her. She sank on to the couch; she was trembling violently. At last he spoke:

"I have tried to keep away from you, God knows!" he said in a harsh, deliberate voice, "but you wouldn't let me. All the time I have been trying to resist you, Pandora, I have felt your eyes pleading, and tempting me, never leaving me alone—and now, at last, you have played your trump card and won. Don't look so sorrowful, lovely, sweet Pandora!"

"Didn't you *want* me to win—when I love you so?" she whispered.

"*Want!*" he said, and with a sort of groan he dropped on his knees beside her and laid his burning face against her little cool hands. "Why are you going away? You mustn't go away!" he whispered again and again. "Don't you know that I can't get on without you any longer, Pandora—that life is just one long desire for you now, beautiful, wicked Pandora?"

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With an inarticulate cry she leaned forward and let him take her in his arms and hold her close, close—crushing out every thought that was not of him; in passionate abandonment she clung to him, whispering again and again that she loved him and loved him. Tears ran down her face, and he kissed them away and kissed her eyes and her hair and her throat till she was quiet.

She had not known that it was possible to be so happy and so sad.

Then, after a time, she began to speak again, her voice still quivering, her fluttering, pretty hands clasping and unclasping about his neck. "I have been so wretched!" she said; "I didn't know you loved me——"

He was silent, his face bent to hers.

"All the time I have loved you," she went on. "Long ago I used to love Edward, but you made me forget him . . . that night in Spain. I have thought of no one but you since then—and hoped that I should meet you again and that you would love me. I used to pray to God for you to come to me. I have gone to the little Catholic Church, on the sea front, and burnt candles for you, again and again——"

"Pandora! Don't——"

"Why not? My prayers were answered. You came. What did you think when you saw me again, Roger?"

"That if I were wise I would go straight away and never look at you again, but you see I couldn't do it! Was it really for me that you were wretched?"

She nodded, but her eyes were happy now; the wretchedness was past and forgotten like a dream. "It made me desperate to see you looking at me coldly,

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and despising me and keeping away from me—so I got engaged to Edward, thinking he would help me to forget you. But he didn't. He only made me love you ten thousand times more, and want you, and think of you the more till I very nearly went mad because you seemed to hate me, Roger."

"There is a narrower line between love and hate than perhaps you think, Pandora!"

But that was not likely to satisfy her.

"But you love me—tell me that you love me," she insisted.

For a moment he was silent.

"Ah! you don't! You don't!" she cried, drawing herself away from him, "or you would have said it before this!"

But he caught her to him again and, with his lips on hers, he gave her the assurance she desired.

"I love you! By God, I love you," he breathed—"beautiful, wicked Pandora!"

"You think I am wicked?"

"Well, aren't you? Wicked enough to go to the devil with me, any way?" he whispered huskily. "Bad and beautiful enough to make me walk open-eyed into Hell for you!"

Breathless in his grasp, she could only smile in his eyes in a way that went to his head like wine and made him forget everything but her beauty and her love, and that she was his—his to do with as he willed.

"I love—I love you!" he whispered as passionately as even she could desire. "Pandora—I left the key in the door for your maid——"

"Did you? But it doesn't matter. She has gone

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home for the night. She went long before you came."

"Then, who came in, just a few minutes ago? I heard the door shut."

"I heard nothing. Perhaps she had forgotten something and came back for it——"

Without a word, he got up and went out into the hall, and she followed him. Everything was very quiet and the little hall was in darkness, for it was past ten o'clock. For a moment they stood silent, hand in hand. The beating of their hearts was audible to Pandora. Presently she called in a hushed voice:

"Marianna!"

There was no answer.

"We are quite alone!" she said.

He opened the front door and felt in the lock for the key. It was gone, but the light from the outside stair window showed it lying on the hall table.

Pandora gave a little cry:

"Someone has been here!" she cried. "Oh, Roger—if it should have been Elizabeth!"

"Elizabeth!" he exclaimed roughly. "How could it be Elizabeth?"

He shut the door softly and came towards her. In the faint light he could just see her white face turned to him and her little, groping hands. "Oh, Pandora!" he whispered.

"I am frightened! What if it should have been Elizabeth? Oh! go, Roger! Go away!"

But even as she said it she clung to him, trembling and kissing his hands that held her, binding him to stay whilst she bid him to go. And if he had been

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mad for her before, he was doubly so now. For no consideration on earth would he have left her; everything was blotted from his consciousness excepting only her.

He told her so in broken, incoherent words as they went back to the studio.

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CHAPTER XX

IN the early dawn of the new day, Roger walked up to The Knowe. The last bright stars were paling, and a pure, cold, unreal light was shed upon the familiar world and made it unfamiliar, more ghostly than midnight, as strange as the unknown. Not a bird stirred; silence was profound. But even as he turned in at the gate, somewhere a blackbird gave a warning note, and instantly it was answered and there was a chorus of song.

He was about to open the front door which, in accordance with Elizabeth's free-and-easy way of things, was very rarely locked, when he heard his name called very softly, and turning, he saw Elizabeth herself, sitting under the apple-tree on the lawn.

He stood, for a moment dumbfounded, staring at her, then, as she made no move and did not speak again, he slowly crossed the lawn to her.

"Elizabeth!" he faltered. "What in the name of all that's foolish——"

Through the pale, grey light he searched her face. Its still calm betrayed nothing. She wore a long overcoat, but her head was bare, and the red gold of her hair shone even in the cold dawn. There was something about her that baffled and eluded him; he could not have said what it was unless that her eyes would not

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meet his but looked through him, or beyond him, or past him.

"Haven't you been to bed?" he asked.

"No; but that doesn't matter. I have always wanted to spend a night out-of-doors quite by myself, just to see what it was like, and now I have had my wish. It has been very strange—different, somehow, and unreal. One gets into the way of taking too much for granted and believing one may depend upon certain things for ever—a mistake. After all, the end of the world must come—and chaos."

So she knew! That was her way of letting him see that she knew.

"Elizabeth! You are tired and overdone. Come in."

"Yes, I am tired, but I am not coming in yet. I want to talk to you. Won't you sit down?"

He shook his head. "I can listen standing," he said. "I know what you are going to say."

"Do you? I scarcely know that myself. Do you know, Roger, it is very funny. I have always thought you perfect! Not only incapable of doing anything wrong yourself, but incapable of understanding when anybody else did. See how little I knew you! I have actually dreaded telling you things! Yesterday, for instance, I went up to Edinburgh, not to enjoy myself—for I loathe going about alone—but to pay a bill at Brown's of £30. And I couldn't bring myself to tell you, for I thought you would think it so wicked of me, so unforgivable, to have a bill like that when you have asked me not to, but to pay ready money for everything. A bill, too, that I couldn't possibly pay—so I borrowed it from Pandora."

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From the moment of seeing Elizabeth, the elation—the fever and excitement with which Pandora's presence had filled him—had gradually left him; he felt now only sadness and disgust. He hated himself, for he loved Elizabeth, not with passion but deeply, tenderly; he could imagine no life without her, no lasting happiness where she was not. He knew that he was causing her more suffering than she would ever express to him, yet even whilst he was filled with remorse and shame, what rent his heart was the knowledge that one word, one look from Pandora would call him back to her side, that he was mad for her, and not till he had drained to the dregs the cup of happiness that her love had filled for him could he be sane and quiet, and at peace again.

He stood looking down at Elizabeth, miserable, torn between the two loves. The face of Pandora, white and passionate and glowing, was between them.

"The bill doesn't matter," was all that he could think of to say; and if you like I'll pay Pandora back to-morrow."

"No; of course the bill doesn't matter—nothing that mattered yesterday matters to-day. I learnt that, amongst other things, sitting here through the night. And as for Pandora, I'll pay her back myself. I'd rather. The only thing I have worth £30 is my engagement ring——"

"Elizabeth! You wouldn't sell that?"

"And why not? It is the sign of a promise I made, and kept, eight years ago. If it means nothing to you any longer, why should it to me?"

She took it from her finger and gave it to him. It

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was a sapphire ring. Elizabeth had never cared for diamonds. He put it in his pocket.

He wished that she would say something—no matter how bitter, how accusing, on the one subject that stood between them. Anything, he felt, would be easier to endure than silence. If she would not speak, he must.

"Elizabeth!" he burst out after a moment's waiting—"is there nothing that I can say or do—to—to——"

"To make me understand, do you mean? I know of nothing, Roger. You see, I do understand. It is the accepting of it that is hard. You have been unfaithful to me because you love Pandora. I went straight to her flat from the station last night, and as the key was in the door I let myself in. Her studio door never shuts quite close—it has a way of swinging open again. Sooner than trouble to get it mended she hung that curtain across the front of it. I heard voices, and I pulled aside the curtain at the moment you were telling her that you loved her—so I came away. I knew you didn't see me, either of you. I came straight home. I hoped you would soon follow me—but you didn't. I waited out here all night. . . . Then I knew——"

"Oh, Elizabeth!" he groaned, racked and torn between love and desire.

Her face was still and composed.

"Would you like to divorce me?" he asked.

"Not unless you wish it yourself. What would be the good? I should only be taking from Betty the father she is devoted to, and you—you would be sorry after a time——"

"If it comforts you at all to know it, I am sorry now," he said. "Listen, Elizabeth! I don't expect you to

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understand this—I scarcely expect you to believe it—but I love you. If I were free to-morrow it would still be you I should love, but—but——"

"I quite understand," she finished for him. "You need say no more. You love Pandora too, and you must have her till you are tired of her. In the meantime at least, the spirit is hers, and the letter and the wedding ring are mine. Of course you expect me to be in despair over such a confession—to make a scene—God knows what! But, somehow, I can't. What I seem to mind most is my little Pandora. . . ." Her voice failed suddenly and she was silent. The truth was that she was worn out, very near the end of both strength and endurance.

The sight of even this emotion was too much for Roger, and he dropped into the seat beside her and put his arms round her. "Oh, Elizabeth!" he murmured. "God, what a beast I am!"

But he saw that it was of Pandora she was thinking and not of him, for with a little half unconscious shiver she disengaged herself from his arms. Cold, bitter words were on her lips, but she checked them. The sight of his haggard faced moved her suddenly to pity. How strange to feel pity for Roger!—Roger, who had always seemed so infinitely better than she was herself; to whom she had always looked up, upon whom she had unconsciously leaned, whom in her secret thoughts she had adored. Whatever she might do in the future now—thoughtless, or indiscreet, or absurd—the thought of what Roger would say or what Roger would think need never cost her another pang, so strangely had their positions, the one to the other, altered in these few

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hours. The idea of it hurt her, yet made her smile, suddenly and tenderly.

He read in her changed expression what any man would have read under the circumstances. He believed himself all at once forgiven.

"Elizabeth!" he said in tones of deepest contrition; "I believe you are the best woman in the world!"

A spasm of pain crossed her face. "Do you suppose it is any comfort to be told that?" she cried. "Do you suppose I don't know that the best women are never the ones to be loved; they are only there to be made use of? I put just such a sentence into the very book I am writing now; I never guessed it could be said in real life. . . . Oh, you are cruel—cruel——!"

She sprang up, no longer able to conceal from him her grief, and began to cross the lawn to the house with rapid steps. But half-way she stopped, seized with sudden faintness, such as had attacked her on the morning she had gone with Roger to Edward's house.

She would have fallen had he not sprung forward and, putting his arms round her, led her back to the seat under the apple-tree. To add to the self-reproach with which her weakness filled him, he saw that the tears had forced their way through her closed eyelids and were rolling down her cheeks. Yielding to an impulse he leaned over her and kissed her sad face, murmuring words of love and pity again and again. She neither repulsed nor encouraged him. Urged by her silence, he was then and there ready to make any sacrifice for her that she might demand—no matter at what cost to himself, and he told her so.

But Elizabeth demanded nothing—it was not her

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way. She only gave him a long, searching look, and closed her eyes again with a little sigh that might have been of utter weariness. Doubtless, at that moment her thoughts had travelled back over the years to the man who was drowned, unalterably hers, safe beyond the reach of disillusion and grief. For it is not death that alienates, but life—life that divides and destroys and annihilates.

Elizabeth understood that now. The knowledge was a pain and a comfort.

* * * * * *

That same morning, nearly at the same hour, Pandora wrote a letter:

"My Dear Elizabeth (she wrote)—

"I am writing to say good-bye to you, and something else. I am going away—partly because I don't feel as if I could live here any longer after what I have found out about my parentage. What I have believed in all my life has proved to be nothing but a dream. I am in a world of shifting sands; nothing in it substantial or real, myself the least real, the least dependable of all.

"I am going to Paris to study Art, and my address I will send to Mr. Martin at the Bank. I have written to him about repaying Mr. Fanshawe's money. He will sell out, or raise it, or do whatever it is that bankers do. Any way, you need not worry about it. As for Mrs. Miles' money—she left me everything in her will, but I won't take it. Mr. Fanshawe knows that; and nothing will induce me to change my mind. I have quite enough without it at any rate. Will you shut up this flat for me? My pictures are worthless and may

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be burnt. I have packed everything I want, and my luggage may be sent after me to Paris.

"Give my love to Betty. In his wiser moments, Roger has known that I am not the right companion for her, and he was right.

"And now, Elizabeth, so much for the business part of my letter, and I come to what really matters.

"Of course, I know that it was you who came to the flat last night. So you *know*, and you will not attempt to persuade me to come back, or try to see me again.

"I am going away because I love Roger, and there is the real reason, and the truth. I am not sorry about last night. I am glad! But if I stayed he would come back to me, and back to me, and you would be miserable, and I could not bear that. So you see, Elizabeth, you must be even more to me than he is—for I am going away.

"You must not blame Roger too much! He is far less to blame than you think. I can't explain things; he tried to keep away; but there is something stronger than ourselves, stronger than the best that is in us. I think that before so very long you will find that he is wholly yours again, and is even glad that I have gone.

"As for me, since the world began, woman has always taken the blame, and I am willing to do it now. Anyway, I have always got my art and the world before me.

"Dear Elizabeth, try to believe that I love you, and that the only hope I have in my heart now is that some day you will want to see me again.

"Your PANDORA."

Pandora wept while she wrote this letter, unrestrainedly and hopelessly. But when she had finished it she dried her eyes, put it in an envelope, and directed

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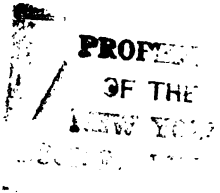
it to Elizabeth. Then she went into her bedroom, tidied her hair, and powdered her face. She tied a thick veil over her hat, and in a few minutes was ready to go. She could not resist one last look round the studio. It was just as it had been last night—with one difference: the sketch of Roger hung no longer upon the wall. She had packed it in her handbag.

For one moment she stood quite still, looking round her. Then she went out quickly and shut the door.

Outside, the street was deserted and very quiet, for it was still early, and in quiet St. Brides the world was only just awakening.

She glanced across at Number 56. Perhaps in the loneliness of her departure the unformed wish was in her heart that she might see Edward's cheerful, careless face at his window and hear his voice calling to her a gay "Good-morning!"

But the blinds were down. Edward still slept.



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